GEORGE EDMONDS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF BIRMINGHAM RADICALISM

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the development of political and social radicalism in Birmingham in the first half of the nineteenth century through a biographical case study of the life of George Edmonds (1788-1868) and his impact on the town. Edmonds was a leading Birmingham radical and Clerk of the Peace for the borough from 1839 to 1864. The thesis considers the extent to which Edmonds' rise from schoolmaster with a modest Baptist background to comfortably-off lawyer confirms or contradicts a traditional view of the town as a site of social mobility and class cohesion. The biographical approach allows a detailed exploration of his work and family life and of his role as a leading actor in Birmingham's political and civic culture. This in turn facilitates a re-examination of the town's radical tradition. While his alliance with Thomas Attwood in the Birmingham Political Union, 1830-32, supports the existence of a specific 'Birmingham radicalism' reflecting class co-operation, the 1816-20 period of radical activity culminating in Edmonds' imprisonment, and the sharp divisions of the early Chartist period, suggest there was no consistent pattern.

Scrutiny of under-used records, coupled with improved search facilities for genealogical and newspaper sources, have facilitated the exploration of Edmonds' family background, civic engagement and beliefs, including his interactions with the ideas of popular radicalism, Benthamism and Owenism. The portrait that emerges is further enhanced by an examination of Edmonds' work on a new 'Universal' Alphabet and Language. The thesis adds significantly to an understanding of Birmingham's social and political history through exploring the life of a neglected radical, George Edmonds, throwing light on social mobility, local and national radicalism and class relations in the nineteenth century.

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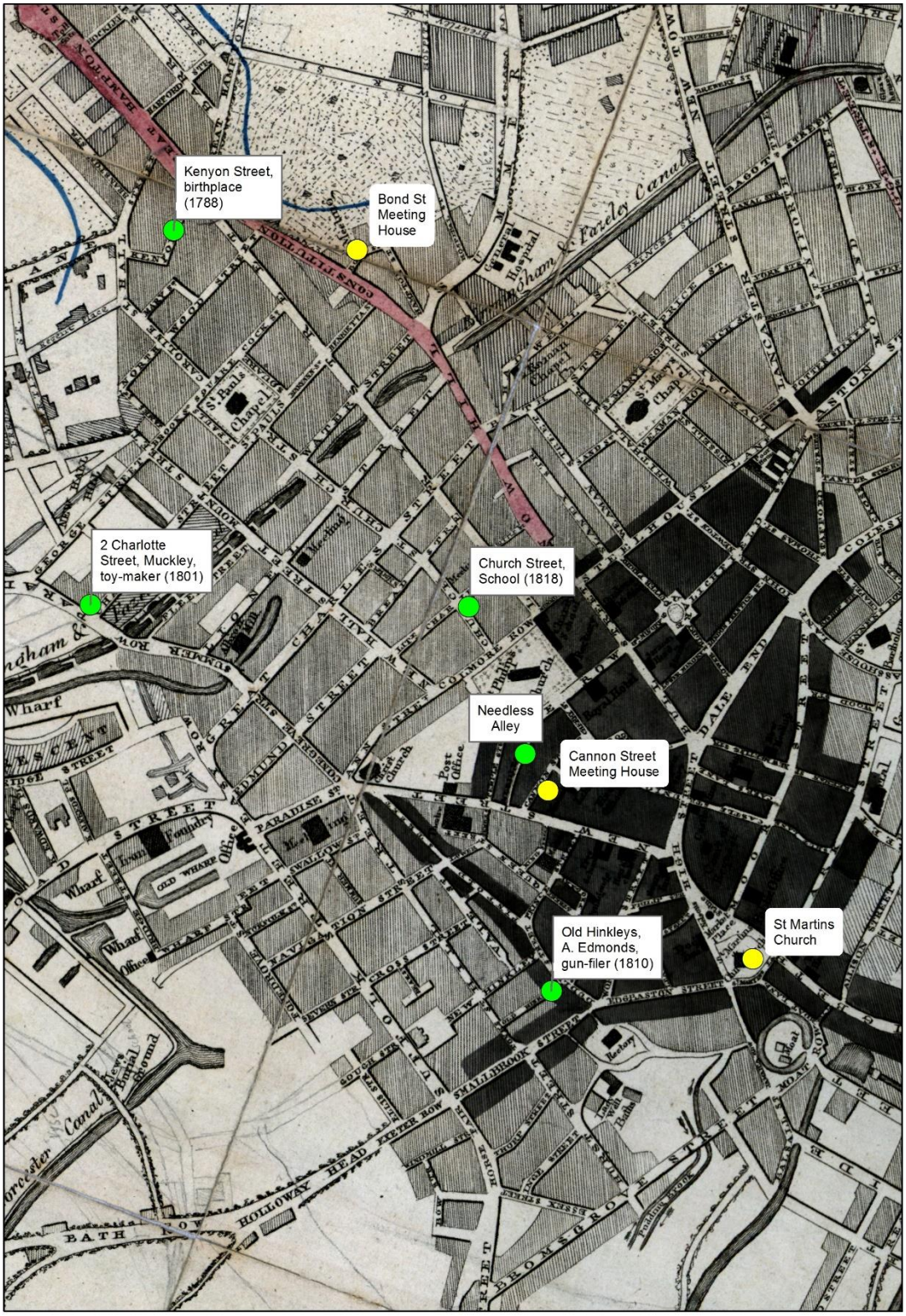
ABBREVIATIONS

ABG	*Aris's Birmingham Gazette*
BA&C	Birmingham Archives and Collections, Library of Birmingham
BD	*Black Dwarf*
BDG	*Birmingham Daily Gazette*
BJ	*Birmingham Journal*
BL	British Library
BNA	British Newspaper Archive
BPU	Birmingham Political Union
CRL	Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham
DALHS	Dudley Archives and Local History Service
GRO	General Register Office
HO	Home Office papers held at the National Archives
MR	*Midland Representative and Birmingham Herald*
NS	*Northern Star*
PMG	*Poor Man's Guardian*
TNA	The National Archives
TS	Treasury Solicitor's papers held at the National Archives
VCH	Victoria County History



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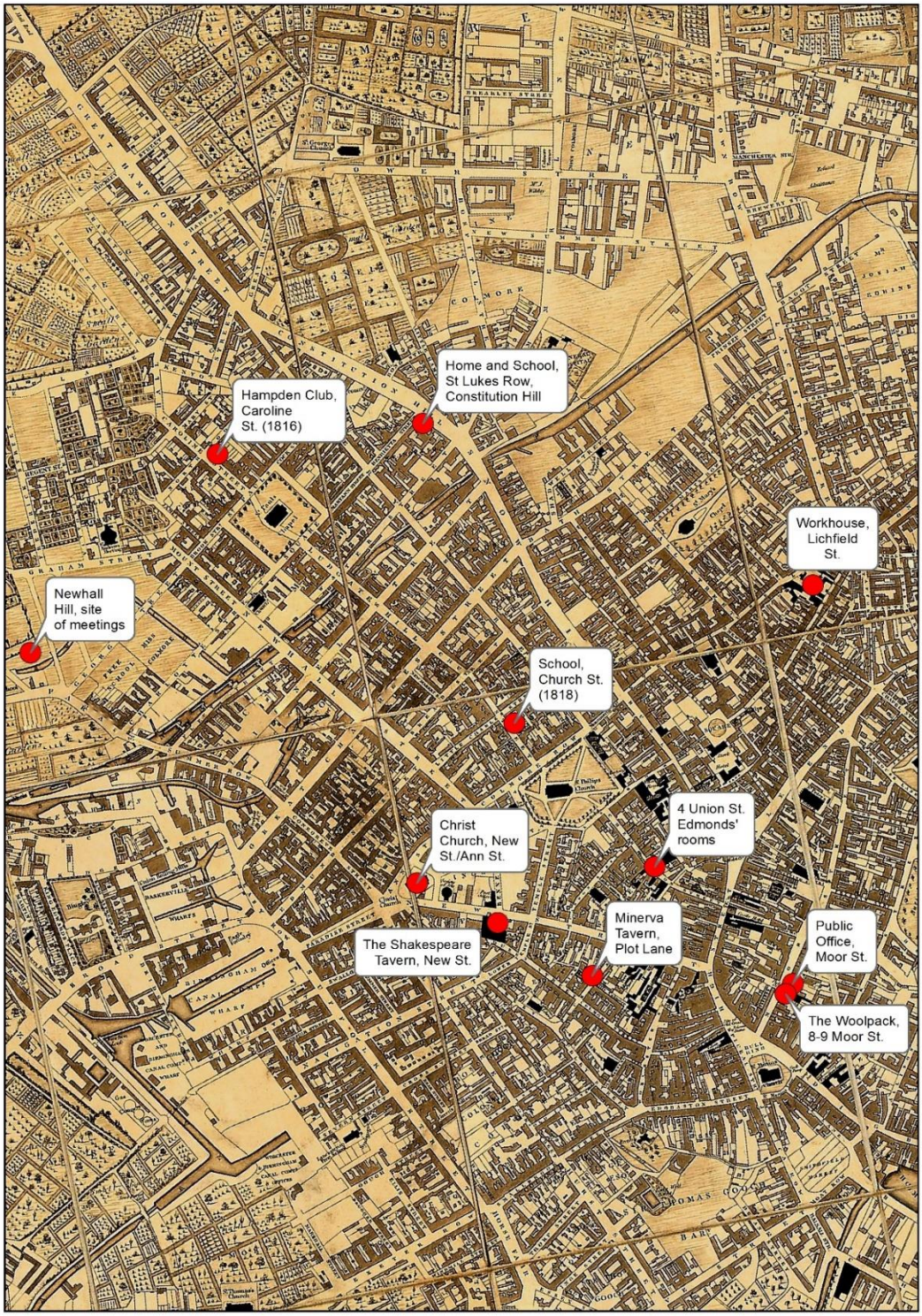
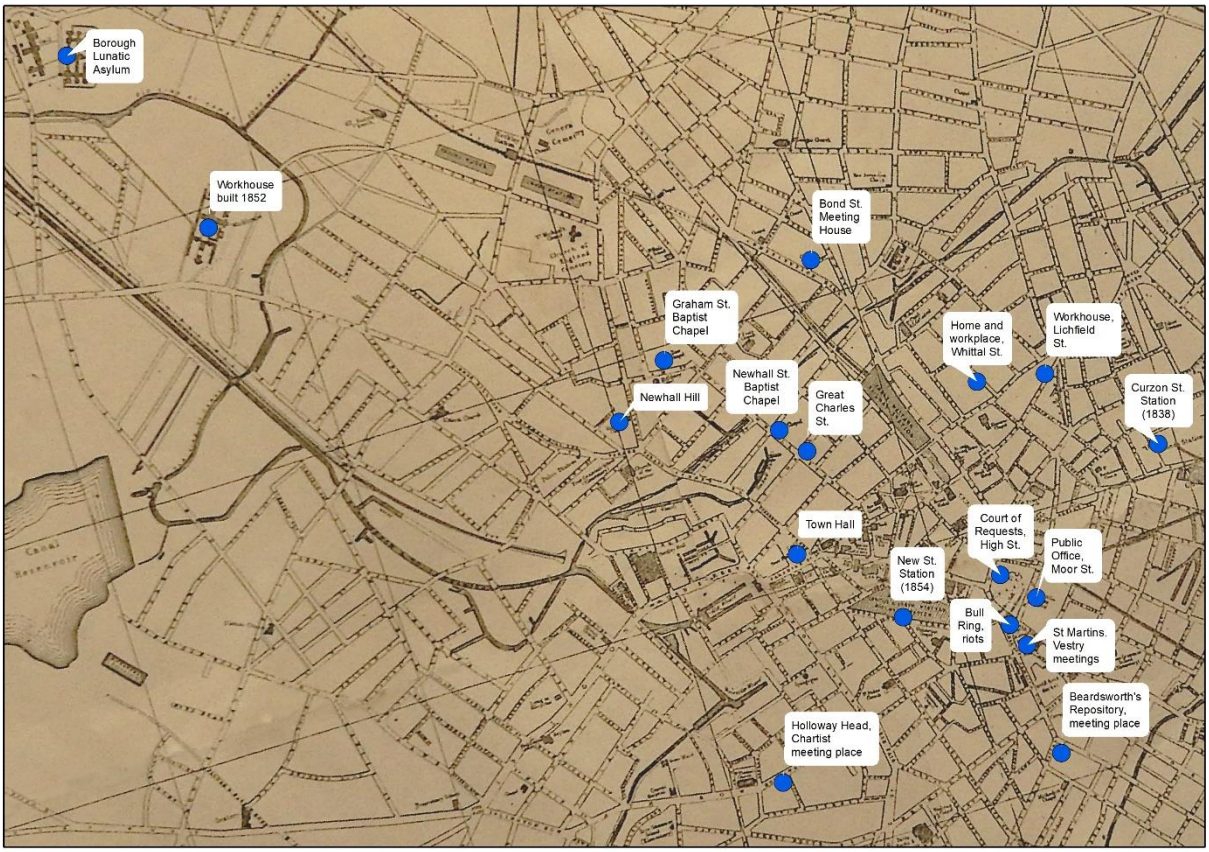


Pigott Smith, J., *Map of Birmingham engraved from a minute trigonometrical survey made in the years 1824 & 1825* (1828), BA&C, showing significant places in Edmonds' life, 1812-1828.



Pigott Smith, J., *Street Map of the Borough of Birmingham* (1855). Library of Birmingham, showing significant places in Edmonds' life, 1828-1868

BIOGRAPHICAL TIMELINE

1786 Bond Street Chapel opens with Edward Edmonds as minister.

1788 George Whitfield Edmonds born on 10 March.

1809 Schoolmaster in Blockley, brief engagement to Sophia Figgures.

1811 In Shrewsbury working on type machine with Joseph Dixon.

1812 Member of Committee of Artizans in Birmingham.

Marriage to Patience Hancock, October.

1813 Continuation of Artizans' Committee; Major Cartwright's visit.

1815 Schoolmaster; son Horace born.

1816 Chair of Birmingham Hampden Club.

1817 Newhall Hill Meetings, Distressed Mechanics' Petition.

1818 Keeps school at Church Street.

Newhall Hill Meeting.

1819 Publishes *Letters to the Inhabitants;* elected Guardian.

Gives up school, keeps rooms at Union St., daughter Clarissa born.

Publishes *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder* and *Edmonds's Weekly Register.*

Newhall Hill meeting; Edmonds and others indicted for seditious conspiracy.

1820 Publishes *The Saturday's Register.*

Trial and conviction for seditious conspiracy 3-4 August; Sarah Edmonds, mother, dies 5 August.

1821 Sentenced to nine months' imprisonment, 1 June.

1822 Released, chairs dinner for T. J. Wooler.

1823 Reverend Edward Edmonds dies.

Keeps school in St Luke's Row, Constitution Hill.

1825 Member of Provisional Committee for Mechanics' Institute.

1827 Begins to appear as a legal representative in local courts.

1828 'General Agent' St Luke's Row, sale of Patience's shoe business.

Supports Catholic Emancipation.

1829 Attorney's Clerk to John Palmer.

1830 Member of the Political Council of the Birmingham Political Union.

1831 *Monthly Argus* case, moves to Whittall Street.
October Newhall Hill Meeting of Political Unions, November crisis.

1832 'Days of May', passing of Great Reform Act.
Publishes the *Philosophic Alphabet.*

1833 Defends full emancipation of slaves. Supports Labour Exchange.

1834 Birmingham Law Society case against solicitor John Palmer.

1835 Fails in attempt to become an attorney, articled to Edwin Wright.
Becomes a Poor Law Guardian again.

1837 Edmonds a member of the Political Council of revived BPU.
Timothy Massey joins Edmonds as clerk.

1838 Daughter Clarissa marries Richard Edensor.
Founding of Chartist Movement, dispute with O'Connor.

1839 Appointed Clerk of the Peace.
Rift with Chartist supporters.
Serious illness.

1840 Horace dies.

1841 Edward Paul Edmonds, nephew, in police.

1842 Fails again in attempt to become an attorney.

1847 Becomes attorney.

1848 Speaks at founding of Reform League.

1851 Hannah Silcock, sister, living at Whittall Street.

1855 Alfred Walter partner in legal practice for a year.

1856 Publishes the *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language.*

1857 Nominates John Bright as Parliamentary candidate.

1860 Edward Paul Edmonds' suicide.
Patience dies.

1863 Attempts made by the Town Council to remove Edmonds as Clerk.

1864 Retires as Clerk of the Peace.

1866 John Edensor, grandson, solicitor at 16 Whittall Street.
Edmonds gives last major speech at Reform Meeting.

1867 Marries Mary Fairfax of Barford.

1868 Illness, placed in Abington Abbey Asylum, death.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the development of political and social radicalism in Birmingham in the first half of the nineteenth century. It takes the form of a biographical case study, exploring the life of George Edmonds (1788-1868), a leading campaigner for political reform in this period. Edmonds was a significant figure in three phases of that campaign: the post-war agitation of 1816-19, at the end of which he was imprisoned for seditious conspiracy; the campaign of the Birmingham Political Union (BPU) from 1830 to 1832; and the first phase of the Chartist movement. The son of a Baptist minister, Edmonds was brought up in the largely artisan community around the Particular Baptist Bond Street Chapel. He was variously a teacher, printer and publisher, lawyer and from 1839 to 1864 served as Clerk of the Peace to the borough of Birmingham.[1]

This examination of Edmonds' life provides a fresh perspective on both the nature of radicalism in Birmingham in the first half of the nineteenth century and on the town's social and political development. The thesis investigates the extent to which Edmonds was, as a provincial radical leader, a significant actor in the movement for political reform. It examines how his political thinking developed and the range of influences on it, both religious and secular; this includes the degree to which popular

[1] S. Thomas, 'Edmonds, George (1788–1868), radical and philologist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2013), https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-74226 (accessed 25 April 2020).

radicalism was affected by the Birmingham context and how it in turn impacted on the town.

The focus on Edmonds' ideas, behaviour and decision-making provides a way to examine the 'Briggsian' narrative of the town as a site of political cooperation and relative class harmony. Edmonds' participation in two periods of sharp political conflict, 1817-20 and 1838-9, as well as in the period of class cooperation in the Birmingham Political Union of the early 1830s, provides an opportunity to interrogate this and alternative perspectives.[2] The thesis considers the pressures on Edmonds as a radical leader, and the extent to which his thinking and decision-making were affected by felt responsibilities to either his own family or the wider town. The second, related theme is of Edmonds' rise from schoolmaster with a modest Baptist background to comfortably-off lawyer, and his journey from imprisoned agitator to Clerk of the Peace. The study considers the extent to which Edmonds' class and religious background and his political activities may have hindered or helped his social progress and how that might have changed over time. Does Edmonds' progress up the social scale confirm the view of Birmingham as a site of social mobility, or do the difficulties that he encountered reveal a town still divided by class and status?

This introductory chapter outlines and assesses, in a literature review, alternative perspectives of nineteenth-century Birmingham's social and political development in relation to its social cohesion and radical tradition. The chapter then explains why

[2] A. Briggs, 'Thomas Attwood and the economic background to the Birmingham Political Union' [1948] in *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs,* Vol.1 (Brighton: Harvester, 1985) pp.138-179 ; Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: Odhams Press, 1963), pp. 187-195; Briggs, 'Political and Administrative History: Political History from 1832', in W.B. Stephens (ed.), *A History of the County of Warwick*: *Volume Seven, The City of Birmingham* (London: 1964), pp. 298-317; G. Barnsby, *Birmingham Working People* (Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services, 1989); C. Behagg, *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1990).

historical biography has been chosen as the appropriate form for the thesis, considers recent developments in this field and explains the approaches used to overcome the problem of limited sources. Finally, the chapters are outlined.

Further aspects of the social and political context of the town will be found in Chapter Two, together with an examination of several subordinate themes which emerged in the course of research. These include the role of the culture of the Particular Baptists, a minority dissenting group, which permeated Edmonds' upbringing, together with the significance of gender roles and family responsibilities in Edmonds' life.

Literature Review: Town, cohesion and radicalism

The story of modern political radicalism in Birmingham stretches from the emergence of dissenting and enlightenment thought within the town in the late eighteenth century to the development of mid-nineteenth-century Liberalism and subsequently to Chamberlain's Liberal Unionism. This thesis concentrates on the early and mid-nineteenth century when George Edmonds was politically active. There was no formal Radical Party, either nationally or locally, although individuals and organisations referred to themselves as 'radical'. By the 1840s, argues Denys Leighton, there was 'a network of organisations and practices commensurate with a Radical "party"'.[3]

The extent to which Birmingham radicalism was a specific trend has been discussed since Asa Briggs' work suggested a particular 'Birmingham model' of development. Briggs argues that an absence of sharp social division, rooted in workshop-based industrial development, produced class cooperation, blunting the edge of

[3] D. Leighton, 'Municipal Progress, Democracy and Radical Identity in Birmingham, 1838-1886', *Midland History*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2000), pp. 115-142.

independent working-class political radicalism and allowing leaders such as Thomas Attwood, John Bright and Joseph Chamberlain to win wide popular support. The influence of nonconformism strengthened this trend.[4]

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century observers and historians had argued that various factors led to Birmingham having a more cohesive society than did the northern industrial towns. These factors included the prevalence of small and medium-sized workplaces, the absence of sharp class differentiation and a pronounced degree of social mobility. Birmingham's first historian, William Hutton, described the openness of Birmingham society which he attributed in part to the town's lack of a charter. He referred as well as to the interconnectedness of different classes and mobility between them.[5] This view was followed by visitors such as De Tocqueville who considered the separation between classes much greater in Manchester than in Birmingham.[6] Samuel Timmins followed this pattern but gave particular emphasis to the place of dissent in enabling economic growth.[7]

The suggestion that this social cohesiveness also contributed to cooperation within political reform movements first came from participants and observers. The Birmingham Political Union actively promoted its image as an alliance of the 'industrious classes'.[8] Friedrich Engels observed that the Birmingham iron-workers had a 'peculiar midway position' which meant that Birmingham remained a 'politically

[4] Briggs, 'Thomas Attwood and the economic background to the Birmingham Political Union' [1948] in *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs,* Vol.1; Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, pp. 187-195; Briggs, 'Political and Administrative History: Political History from 1832', *VCH Warwickshire Vol. Seven, Birmingham,* pp. 298-317.
[5] W. Hutton, *An History of Birmingham*, 2nd ed. (Birmingham, 1783), pp. 83-6; H Smith, 'William Hutton and the Myths of Birmingham', *Midland History*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2015), pp. 53-73**.**
[6] Smith, 'William Hutton and the Myths of Birmingham', pp. 61-62.
[7] S. Timmins, (ed.), *The Resources, Products, and Industrial History of Birmingham, and the Midland Hardware District* (Abingdon, 2009 [1866]). The significance of dissenting/nonconformist culture will be further discussed in Chapter Two.
[8] See Chapter Five.

radical, but not a Chartist, town' by the mid-nineteenth century; Richard Cobden praised the 'freer intercourse between all classes' that underpinned Birmingham's acceptance of John Bright.[9] In the twentieth century, Briggs' view of the connection between the social structure of Birmingham and its form of radicalism is followed by E.P. Thompson who accepts that social gradients shelved more gently than elsewhere: 'the artisan might rise to the status of a small master; in terms of economic recession masters and journeymen were afflicted alike.' [10]

The wide support given to this model, especially from contemporary observers, gives it a particular appeal, but it faces some difficulties. First, there were several periods of sharp political conflict punctuating the apparent cohesion and cooperation, including the Priestley Riots of 1791, the period of intense radical activity and answering repression, 1817 to 1820, the bitter disputes over church rates in the 1830s and the Chartist riots of 1839. Secondly, both contemporary newspaper reports and histories inevitably concentrate on mainstream politics, dominated by elite or middle-class male figures. These voices might overlook difference and conflict, particularly if this clashed with the preferred image of their town. Thirdly, analyses of political radicalism and liberalism in Birmingham must account for the success of Chamberlain in taking his supporters into 'Liberal Unionism', and therefore an alliance with the Conservatives, at the end of the century.

Challenges made to the Briggsian model address one or more of these problems. R.B. Rose provides a detailed account of radical activity and economic protests in the period of the wars with France and their aftermath, arguing that the beginnings of

[9] F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in 1844* (St. Albans: Panther edition, 1969 [1892]), p. 226; Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 191.
[10] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 396-7.

independent working-class organisation can be detected.[11] George Barnsby stresses the importance of independent working-class activity within Birmingham's radical tradition.[12] Clive Behagg challenges the assumption that relatively small-scale production lessened class conflict and argues that changes in the position of the small producer contributed to increased conflict in the 1830s and 1840s.[13] Peter Jones considers how religious differences fractured the elite consensus in the late eighteenth century, culminating in the Priestley Riots of 1791.[14]

Eric Hopkins, however, advances a modified Briggsian interpretation of Birmingham's social and political development, arguing that industrialisation in Birmingham in the period 1760-1840 did not result in 'a harsh division into mutually opposed social groups, but rather the development of tolerant class relations'. This meant that the town 'may well be proud of its social and economic achievements during the first century of industrialisation'. [15] In the most recent extended political history of the town, Roger Ward is more cautious than Hopkins, drawing attention to periods of conflict and a low level of tolerance for political minorities although overall, he argues, there is much to validate the conventional model.[16] Francesca Carnevali and Jennifer Aston suggest that patterns of entrepreneurship and social mobility in

[11] R. B. Rose 'Political and Administrative History' in *VCH Warwickshire Vol. Seven, Birmingham*, pp. 270-297; Rose, 'The origins of working-class radicalism in Birmingham', *Labour History,* Vol. 9 (1965), pp. 6-14.
[12] G. Barnsby, *Birmingham Working People* (Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services, 1989).
[13] C. Behagg, 'Radical Politics and conflict at the point of production: Birmingham 1815-1845. A study in the relationship between the classes', (Unpub. PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1982); Behagg, 'Myths of Cohesion: capital and compromise in the historiography of nineteenth century Birmingham', *Social History*, Vol.11, No. 3 (October 1986), pp. 375-384; Behagg, *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1990).
[14] P. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: science, technology and culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands* (Manchester: MUP, 2009), pp.189-200.
[15] E. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town: Birmingham and the Industrial Revolution* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), p.185. The specific debate between Rose and Hopkins about the period of the French wars and their aftermath is outlined in Chapter Four.
[16] R. Ward, *City-State and Nation: Birmingham's Political History, 1830-40* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2005), pp. 8-14.

the second half of the nineteenth century follow the pattern outlined by Briggs while, for the late eighteenth century, Susan Whyman argues that 'rough diamonds' like William Hutton were able to make social, business and civic progress.[17]

A further question is the extent to which a political thread can be detected between earlier radicalism and later liberalism in the town. J. T. Bunce's Whiggish history suggested a march towards liberal interventionism, held up by the 'economist' period on the town council in the 1840s.[18] Leighton argues that several aspects of the town's radical politics counter that narrative: for example, the disagreements that occurred between radicals over state intervention and forms of democracy.[19] Furthermore, the coalition that made up the BPU was led not by Whigs, but by Attwood's group of currency reformers who included erstwhile Tories. [20]

Several authors have assessed the strength of Tory presence at both elite and plebeian levels. David Cannadine, while acknowledging that the influence of county Tories was less than in some other towns, describes a degree of influence and cooperation until a breakdown in relations in the 1830s.[21] Eric Hopkins draws attention to the 'deep conservatism' amongst many Birmingham workers, while Harry Smith considers that Tory pamphlets written during and after the French wars, especially those by the pseudonymous Nott family, contributed to a Birmingham

[17] F. Carnevali, J. Aston, 'Victorian Capitalists and Middle-Class Formation: Reflections on Asa Briggs' Birmingham' in M. Taylor, (ed.), *The Age of Asa* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 79-89 and see Chapter Three for a recent response; S. Whyman, *The Useful Knowledge of William Hutton: Culture and Eighteenth-Century Birmingham* (Oxford: OUP, 2018).
[18] J. Bunce, *History of the Corporation of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1878).
[19] Leighton, 'Municipal Progress, Democracy and Radical Identity in Birmingham, 1838-1886', pp. 120-121.
[20] C. Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union and the Movements for Reform in Britain 1830-39* (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1979). Flick's detailed account of the BPU is assessed in Chapter Six.
[21] D. Cannadine*, Lords and Landlords: the Aristocracy in the Towns, 1774-1967* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1980), esp. pp. 149-151.

town identity, reflected in the importance of concepts such as 'industriousness'.[22] These strands of Toryism formed a counterpoint to Birmingham radicalism throughout Edmonds' life: he was a target of popular Tory loyalist propaganda in the post-war period and, in an episode explored in this thesis, clashed with a Tory-radical critic, Joseph Allday, in the early 1830s. [23]

The strain of popular Toryism may provide one explanation of the later appeal of Unionism and Chamberlain's social imperialism. Another might be the relationship between the growth of Birmingham's role in colonial expansion and its impact on the relative strength of radical internationalism and support for overseas ventures. Catherine Hall examines how the relationship between 'metropole' and colonies changed and impacted on thinking about race.[24] Malcolm Dick describes the tension between Birmingham's involvement with colonial trade, especially in gun manufacture, and the anti-slavery movement.[25] Andy Green argues that 'a complex mixture of post-emancipation insecurities and imperial ambition' underlay the Civic Gospel myth.[26] The co-existence of both an 'England First' trend within Birmingham radicalism and an internationalist outlook is a contradiction yet to be fully explored, and one in which Edmonds was involved.[27]

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[22] Hopkins, *Rise of the Manufacturing Town*, p. 185; H. Smith, *Propertied Society and Public Life: the Social History of Birmingham, 1780-1832* (Unpub. PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 2013), pp. 111-142. Smith argues that both Tories and radicals shared the use of this concept. The point to note here is that loyalist writings contributed to this shared discourse.

[23] See Chapter Six and S. Thomas, '"One of the Most Extraordinary Publications Which Has Ever Appeared...": George Edmonds, v. the Monthly Argus' in I. Cawood and L. Peters (eds.), *Print, Politics and the Provincial Press in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), pp. 57-80.

[24] C. Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002). This is further explored in Chapter Two.

[25] M. Dick, 'Joseph Priestley, the Lunar Society and Anti-Slavery', in M. Dick (ed.), *Joseph Priestley and Birmingham* (Studley: Brewin Books, 2005), pp. 65-80.

[26] A. Green, '"The Anarchy of Empire," Reimagining Birmingham's Civic Gospel', *Midland History* Vol. 36 No.2 (2011), p. 165.

[27] B. Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working-Class Problems in the Age of Industrialisation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), pp. vii-xiv; P. Hollis, 'Antislavery and British Working-Class Radicalism in the Years of Reform', in C. Bolt and S. Drescher (eds.), *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1980), pp. 294-315.

Any discussion of radicalism in Birmingham must necessarily intersect with the complex debates about wider British radicalism: whether it is possible to speak of a 'radical tradition', the relationship of radical movements to economic circumstances, the significance of language in determining political programmes, the need to uncover missing voices and the significance of space. The most influential analysis supporting the idea of a plebeian radical tradition is that of E.P. Thompson. Rejecting a functionalist definition of class, Thompson celebrates agency, seeing class as a social and cultural formation. His work suggests a thread of popular radical activity which led to a form of working-class consciousness by 1832.[28] He contrasts a Paineite, republican tradition with an alternative constitutional one preferred, for instance, by William Cobbett.[29] These ideas have been subjected to a series of criticisms. J.C.D. Clark suggests that 'radicalism' as a political term should not be applied to movements before the word came into use in 1820.[30] Glen Burgess, however, does not rule out a retrospective use of the term: he notes that while there may be changes between one period and another, continuities exist, including the demand for universal male suffrage.[31] Edward Vallance has returned to the idea of a radical tradition, albeit one that is variegated and regularly reinvented.[32]

Works associated with the 'linguistic turn' in historical analysis of the late twentieth century, led by Gareth Stedman Jones, questioned both the extent of a distinguishable working-class consciousness and the relationship of protest, specifically Chartism, to economic circumstances. Stedman Jones argues that

[28] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 9-15.
[29] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 829-30.
[30] J.C.D. Clark, 'Religion and the Origins of Radicalism in Nineteenth-century Britain', in G. Burgess and M. Festenstein, (eds.), *English Radicalism 1550-1850* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), pp. 241-284.
[31] G. Burgess, 'Preface', in Burgess and Festenstein, *English Radicalism 1550-1850*, pp. 1-16.
[32] E. Vallance, *A Radical History of Britain. Visionaries, Rebels and Revolutionaries: the Men and Women who Fought for Our Freedoms* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 2009), pp. 1-18.

Chartism was trapped in a programme and radical discourse that, in trying to unite all the unrepresented, focused on constitutional questions and could not successfully confront the problems posed by industrial capitalism.[33] Other writers including John Belchem and James Epstein modify this viewpoint, disputing Stedman Jones' overconcentration on language, pointing out the significance of the 'mass platform', the importance of symbols and theatre and the existence of a degree of class consciousness in early nineteenth-century radicalism.[34] In contrast, Patrick Joyce suggests that a populist view of 'the people' rather than one of class division, permeated radical discourse. The debate has included questions of identity, the need to explore 'hidden' voices, as well as alternative structural factors that might influence political action and adherence.[35] The idea of class consciousness has been maintained, albeit in a modified form, from Dorothy Thompson's insistence that belief in a common interest united different identities within Chartism to Malcolm Chase's suggestion that a 'shared awareness among working people of commonality' was in evidence by the early 1830s.[36]

Recent work on the importance of place and space has drawn attention to the actions as well as the words and symbols employed by radicals. Katrina Navickas

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[33] G. Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', in *Languages of Class: Studies in Working Class History 1832-1982* (Cambridge: CUP, 1983), pp. 90-178.
[34] J. Belchem, 'Radical Language and Ideology in Early Nineteenth-Century England: The Challenge of the Platform', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies,* Vol. 20, No. 2 (Summer, 1988), pp. 247-259; J. Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England* (London: Breviary Stuff, 2014 [1994]); Belchem, *Popular Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1996).
[35] P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1840-1914* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990); D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 52-73; M. Savage and A. Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class, 1840-1940* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 15-16; M. Roberts*, Political Movements in Urban England 1832-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 4-9.
[36] D. Thompson, 'Chartism and the Historians' in D. Thompson, *Outsiders: Class, Gender and Nation* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 19-44; M. Chase, *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour* (London: Breviary Stuff, 2002), pp. 113-4; Chase, 'Author's response' to Robert Saunders' review of *Chartism: a New History* (Review No. 699), https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/699 (accessed 24 September 2020).

has observed that 'popular politics was not solely conducted within the leaves of a pamphlet'.[37] Navickas has considered how and why radicals of the period fought for the right to meet and speak, contesting the use of space which was often denied them. A particular 'place' might have a symbolic meaning and cultural associations but at the same time, access to it as a material space was a significant question for those attempting to organise radical meetings.[38] In Birmingham, Newhall Hill had a symbolic importance as a site of popular meetings, and display and drama within the movement for political reform were vital, but the way in which town space was controlled was also a material question which had implications for Edmonds' responsibilities and reputation as a radical leader, and bears further investigation.

Histories which explore radicalism in Birmingham have, for the most part, either examined broad movements and organisations, or the lives of leading individuals from middle-class backgrounds.[39] The question of the relative balance of cohesion and conflict in the political and social life of the town remains open. The extent to which the political programme of popular radicalism adapted to or clashed with the interests of the middle-class leadership of the town warrants investigation, as does the place of material factors and class conflict in the breakdown of relations at key moments. By examining the role of a radical leader who came from a less privileged background, who faced obstacles in both his political and professional career and who confronted problems of practical leadership, it should be possible to throw new

[37] K. Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789-1848* (Manchester: MUP, 2016), p. 5.
[38] Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place*, pp. 4-19.
[39] An exception is S. Roberts, *The Chartist Prisoners: The Radical Lives of Thomas Cooper (1805-1892) and Arthur O'Neill (1819-1896)* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008).

light on these questions. The challenges of the biographical method are outlined below.

Methodology and Sources

This thesis takes the form of a biographical study. This approach was initially chosen as a suitable method in the belief that the study of George Edmonds would act as a device for investigating the twin issues of social structure and radicalism in early nineteenth-century Birmingham. This remains the core of the study, but exploration of Edmonds' life has added new dimensions: the significance of his background as a member of the minority dissenting community of the Particular Baptists, the relationship with his family, his character and a period of fading mental health. Edmonds' interest in, and work on, a Universal Language demands attention and is accorded a separate chapter. The thesis builds on work undertaken for the biography of Edmonds written for the *ODNB*.[40]

'Biography remains the profession's unloved stepchild', suggested David Nasaw in 2009. [41] Nevertheless, as the debate that he was introducing revealed, historical biography has been renewed and adapted in the last few decades in what has been referred to as a 'biographical turn'. New approaches such as those adopted by feminist historians have been absorbed into the field. [42] From Claire Tomalin's study of the life of Ellen Ternan, to Rachel Holmes' biography of Saartjie Baartman, these writers have changed the angle of view.[43] This wider 'life writing' field acknowledges

[40] S. Thomas, 'Edmonds, George (1788–1868), radical and philologist', *ODNB*, 2013.
[41] D. Nasaw, 'Introduction to the Round Table', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 114, No. 3 (June 2009), pp. 573-578.
[42] H. Lee*, Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), pp.126-129; B. Caine, *Biography and History* (London: Red Globe Press, 2019), pp. 22-24.
[43] C Tomalin, *The Invisible Woman: The Story of Nelly Ternan and Charles Dickens* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991); R. Holmes, *The Hottentot Venus, The Life and Death of Saartjie Baartman: Born 1789 – Buried 2002* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008).

the significance of lesser-known lives, refining the approach of late twentieth-century social historians writing 'history from below', using wide sources and examining the many ways in which an individual is both influenced by, and impacts upon, the surrounding culture.[44] These new approaches are not without their challenges. In some instances, especially in the field of literary biography or where sources are very limited, authors can choose to imagine a great deal, arguing that such imaginings are no more indefensible than the subjective interpretation of sources employed by a more orthodox biographer.[45] This is not the approach chosen here: a wide variety of sources has been employed to cast light on Edmonds' life and where speculation has been employed, as is inevitable, it is clearly acknowledged.

No cache of Edmonds' papers or diaries has been uncovered in this research; sources remain limited but varied. Unlike Samuel Bamford, Edmonds did not write his own account of his participation in the radical movement.[46] The limitations on sources, together with the fact that Edmonds was neither a member of the Birmingham elite nor well-known outside his home town may explain why he has not been the subject of a modern biographical study, beyond the twentieth-century overview by Lesley Woodward which provides a summary of Edmonds' place in Birmingham's political culture.[47] The enforced use of a wide range of sources to

[44] L. Banner, 'Biography as History', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 114, No. 3 (June 2009), pp. 580-581; Caine, *Biography and History,* pp. 63-67; R. Watts, 'Collecting Women's Lives in 'National' History: opportunities and challenges in writing for the *ODNB'*, Women's History Review, Vol. 19, No. 1, (2010), pp. 109-124. Recent examples of this approach include K. Isles, *Constructing the Eighteenth-Century Woman: The Adventurous History of Sabrina Sidney* (Unpub. PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2012), B. Bowring, *From Penury to Published Poet: The Cultural Journey of Ann Yearsley* (Unpub. PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2018).
[45] R. Scurr, *John Aubrey: My Own Life (London: Vintage, 2015).* Ruth Scurr has defended her use of a fictional diary as a way of bringing Aubrey's own voice to the forefront, *Guardian*, 26 April 2016.
[46] S. Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967 [1844]).
[47] L.A. Woodward, 'Edmonds, George (1788-1868)' in J. Baylen and N. Gossman, (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Radicals, Vol. Two 1830-1870* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1984).

overcome this deficit has hopefully contributed to producing a rounded evaluation of Edmonds' life.

Several contemporary accounts of Edmonds' life acted as a starting point for the investigation. Eliezer Edwards' *Personal Recollections of Birmingham Men* provides both an outline biography, together with several illuminating anecdotes, and a sense of character.[48] It is an openly sympathetic account: for example, one early remembrance, used to demonstrate his early hatred of oppression, is taken from a conversation with Edmonds himself, and might have been embroidered by him. Written from a liberal viewpoint, the biography lauds his role in the early reform movement and in the BPU, applauding the political alliance which Edmonds helped to create, but it is silent on the split in early Chartism. It praises his courage and abilities as a leader. However, it is clear-eyed on his tendency to be quarrelsome, his overweening desire to win cases in court and his later mental confusion. It includes references to his early family life but nothing on later family concerns.

Obituaries and later memoirs describe Edmonds' contribution to the political life of the town.[49] Some of these also trace his interest in the question of a Universal Language.[50] Although these accounts are not hagiographic, they nevertheless paint a positive picture of Edmonds as a town figure worthy of respect, smoothing over any less desirable aspects of his personality and downplaying aspects of his politics less acceptable to local newspapers, whether conservative or liberal. There are two short sympathetic remembrances from younger political activists, G.J. Harney and

[48] E. Edwards, 'George Edmonds', in *Personal Recollections of Birmingham Men* (Birmingham, 1877), no page numbers. For Edwards, see S. Roberts, *Now Mr Editor! Letters to the Newspapers on Nineteenth Century Birmingham* (Birmingham Biographies Series, 2015), pp. 8-10.
[49] *Birmingham Journal* (*BJ),* 4 July 1868*; Midland Counties Express* and *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* (*ABG),* 4 July 1868, collected in BA&C, Birmingham Scrapbook Vol. 1, Pt. 2A; 'George Edmonds and George Edmonds', *Notes and Queries,* 6th Series, IV, 6 August 1881 and 10 September 1881.
[50] These are detailed in Chapter Eight.

George Holyoake, valuable because they come from individuals who held radical views that were different from each other – Harney a left-wing Chartist and Holyoake a co-operator.[51] The nineteenth-century histories of Birmingham by J.A. Langford and R.K. Dent devote considerable attention to the movement for political reform, especially to the years of the BPU.[52] Both are written from the perspective of moderate reform and present a positive view of Edmonds as a maker of liberal Birmingham. Woodward's twentieth-century account critically assesses Edmonds' activities as a radical but says little about his working, religious or family life.[53]

The limitations of such accounts make it essential to go back to original sources wherever possible for both Edmonds' viewpoints and criticisms of him. Edmonds published several *Letters to Inhabitants* between 1819 and 1825 and in 1819-20, his *Weekly Recorder and Saturday Register*, followed by *Edmonds's Weekly Register* and then *Saturday's Register*.[54] It is not always possible to distinguish the authorial voice from those of fellow-contributors, and the press restrictions of the period mean that some political viewpoints do not reach the page. It is only occasionally possible to glimpse evidence of disagreements. Edmonds did not publish under his own name in 1830-32 but probably contributed to the *Birmingham Journal* and certainly to the *Midland Representative*, where it is possible to discern his writing. There are substantial accounts of Edmonds' speeches, especially in the *Birmingham Journal*

[51] G. Holyoake, *Life of Holyoake: Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1906), pp. 31-32; 'George Edmonds No 1 and No 2', *Notes and Queries,* 6th Series, IV, 31 Dec 1881.
[52] R. K. Dent, *Old and New Birmingham, Vols 1-3,* 1878-1880 (reprinted by EP Publishing, Wakefield, 1973); Dent, *The Making of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Allday, 1894); J. Langford, *A Century of Birmingham Life, Vols 1 and 2* (Birmingham: E.C. Osborne*,* 1868*)*; J. Langford, *Modern Birmingham and its Institutions: a Chronicle of Local Events from 1841 to 1871* (Birmingham: Osborne, 1877).
[53] Woodward, 'Edmonds, George (1788-1868)'.
[54] BA&C 74226, G. Edmonds, *Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham*, II-IX, 1819; BA&C 60381, G. Edmonds, *Letter to the Payers of Levies of the Parish of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1825); *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder and Saturday Register* (1819*); Edmonds's Weekly Register* (1819*); The Saturday's Register* (1820*).*

and *Reports* of BPU meetings. These were edited with some care by Joseph Parkes and were occasionally toned down to avoid prosecutions although he stated that this happened 'in a very few instances only'.[55]

Alternative perspectives are provided by both the loyalist and radical press. Tory and loyalist voices were particularly significant in 1817-20: a series of pamphlets, including those written by members of the fictional Nott family, give an insight into the popular loyalism of the period. A satirical ballad, 'The Orator Unmasked', provides an alternative and critical view of Edmonds' life as a young man and as an agitator.[56] During Edmonds' intense activity as a BPU leader, an alternative voice is provided by the *Monthly Argus*, itself a partisan critic of the BPU.[57] The *Poor Man's Guardian* and later the *Northern Star* include critical views of the stance taken by Edmonds and fellow leaders of Birmingham radicalism in the 1830s.

Edmonds' interest in and contributions to the search for a Universal Language occupied considerable time and energy through most of his adult life. Chapter Eight, which situates his publications within the history of that endeavour and explores the possible motivations for his work, relies on Edmonds' two publications on the topic, together with that of John Wilkins.[58] The chapter is informed by recent studies of the Universal Language movement: scholarly works by James Knowlson, Umberto Eco

[55] BA&C, L76.11**,** Birmingham Institutions, Vol. 2, Pt.1, Political Union, E1, annotated by Joseph Parkes. There is a parallel collection in E2.
[56] CRL, M. Meek (pseudonym), *The Orator Unmasked: a new serio-comic ballad by Moses Meek* (Birmingham, 1819).
[57] *Birmingham Argus and Public Censor*,1828-9; *Monthly Argus and Public Censor* 1829-33.
[58] G. Edmonds, *The Philosophic Alphabet with an Explanation of its principles and a Variety of Extracts, Illustrating its Adaptation to the sounds of the English Language and also of the Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, Italian and Spanish to which is added a Philosophic System of Punctuation* (London: Simkin and Marshall, 1832); Edmonds, G., *A Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language: comprising a scientific classification of the radical elements of discourse and illustrative translations from the holy scriptures and the principal British classics to which is added a Dictionary of the Language* (London: Richard Griffin, 1856); J. Wilkins, *An Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (London: Gellibrand and Martyn, 1668).

and Rhodri Lewis and Arika Okrent's *In the Land of Invented Languages*, a popular work written by a linguistics scholar.[59]

Family and working life have been explored using several little-used manuscripts. The Minute Book of the meetings of the Bond Street Chapel, alongside other records from Cannon Street and Bond Street Baptist churches, illuminate the culture of the Particular Baptists and the plebeian community surrounding them.[60] The *Diary of Joseph Dixon* reveals Edmonds' pursuits as a young man while the *Minute Book of the Birmingham Law Society* shows the obstacles to Edmonds becoming a qualified lawyer.[61]

Electronic newspaper and genealogical search facilities have provided valuable information about family members and their occupations. The contrasting fates of different arms of the Edmonds family, some experiencing social advancement as ministers or tradespeople, others facing penury after family tragedy, illustrate the insecurity and precariousness of late Georgian and Victorian society and contribute to an interrogation of social mobility in Birmingham. Newspaper searches have also revealed detail about Edmonds' civic activities and working life, especially his legal career.

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[59] J. Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes in England and France, 1600-1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975); U. Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language* (London: Fontana, 1997); R. Lewis, *Language, Mind and Nature: Artificial Languages in England from Bacon to Locke* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007); A. Okrent*, In the Land of Invented Languages: Adventures in Linguistic Creativity, Madness and Genius (*New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2010*).*

[60] BA&C BC/1 Bond Street Church documents, 405889, *Bond Street Baptist Chapel Minute Book 1785-1828*; 405835, *Minute Book for the Use of the Bond Street Society for Mental Improvement*; BA&C BC/2 Cannon Street Church documents, especially BC 2/4/1/1/1-3, *Church Meeting Minute Books*.

[61] CRL MS14, *Journals and Notebooks of Joseph Dixon*; BA&C, MSS 2830, *Records and Minutes of the Birmingham Law Society from 3rd January 1818 to 31 October 1857,* Minute Book A 1818-1857.

The Following Chapters

The thesis is structured in a broadly chronological order, but while Chapters Four, Six and Seven concentrate on Edmonds' political life and Birmingham's radical culture, others are centred on family, wider interests, occupations and ambitions.

Chapter Two concentrates on contextual questions, including social, political and civic changes in Birmingham in Edmonds' lifetime. It includes a section on the culture of the Particular Baptists, in which Edmonds grew up, discussing the beliefs and practices of this lesser-known part of the dissenting community.

Chapter Three covers the years from Edmonds' birth in 1788 to his marriage in 1812. It looks at Edmonds' family background and the church community of artisans, small manufacturers and servants. It suggests how this background might have influenced the development of Edmonds' political and religious outlook. The chapter also explores Edmonds' activities as a young man, his interest in printing technology, his work as a schoolmaster and his marriage, considering how these activities set a template for his later political and working career.

Chapter Four (1812-22) focuses on Edmonds' involvement in the campaign for political reform towards the end of, and after, the Napoleonic Wars. It explores the development of Edmonds' political outlook, his participation in Birmingham's radical culture and the relationship of that culture to popular radicalism at a national level. It assesses his role and responsibilities as a radical leader, his challenge to the civic leadership in the town, and to what extent he was a 'moderating' influence. It considers the national significance of Edmonds' trial, 1820-21.

Chapter Five (1816-1836) is concerned with Edmonds' family and working life. It analyses the impact of his trial and imprisonment on his family and the role of his

wife Patience. It explores his gradual recovery of a position in the town and considers the extent to which Edmonds was able to overcome the barriers to joining the legal profession. It argues that his journey reveals the influence of class and status divisions in Birmingham, as well as the potential for individuals to partially overcome these.

Chapters Six and Seven are concerned with Edmonds' role in the movement for political reform, his participation in radical causes and his place in early Chartism**.** Chapter Six, covering the years from 1823 to 1833, explores how Edmonds interacted with a variety of radical ideas and causes and with alternative views. It includes an assessment of the extent to which popular plebeian radicalism fed into the BPU and considers Edmonds' significance in maintaining the alliance. Chapter Seven describes Edmonds' role in the divisions in the town in the mid-to-late 1830s, including the church rates controversy and the campaign for corporate status. It assesses his importance in the split in Birmingham Chartism and the possible reasons for Edmonds' difficulties in navigating this terrain, exploring the relationship between his political choices and his ambitions, family responsibilities and illness.

Chapter Eight covers Edmonds' interest in and contribution to the idea *o*f a Universal Alphabet and Language, describing his two publications on this topic and considering the place of his work within the tradition of these ideas. It assesses the extent to which Edmonds' interest in this topic was motivated by universalist and internationalist ideas and how much it related to his personality, whether obsessive behaviour or single-minded determination.

Chapter Nine provides an overview of Edmonds' later years, his family responsibilities, his work as Clerk of the Peace and his position in the town as veteran reformer. It considers the difficulties of his old age and mental affliction.

The concluding chapter, Chapter Ten, assesses the extent to which Edmonds' journey confirms or contradicts alternative views of Birmingham's political and social development. It considers the wider implications for the history of provincial radicalism and points to areas for further research, including the place of a radical internationalist tradition in the town, the transition from radicalism to liberalism and the participation of women in the early political reform movement.

Chapter Two

CONTEXTS: TOWN, GENDER AND RELIGIOUS CULTURE

This chapter examines the context of Edmonds' life in Birmingham and how this might have affected him, including the fields of environment, working patterns, civic, print, and religious cultures and gender roles, with relevant historiography included in appropriate sections. The concluding two sections focus on the culture of the Particular Baptists, the church in which Edmonds was raised, a lesser-known and arguably neglected part of the dissenting community. These sections explore the Particular Baptists' beliefs and practices at a national and local level and consider how these might have influenced Edmonds.

Growth, manufacturing and working lives

Birmingham's growth and development during Edmonds' lifetime was dramatic, even if it was not the village-to-city transformation of popular myth. Eighteenth-century Birmingham had changed from a significant but small market and metal-working town to the third largest urban centre in England and Wales.[1] By the 1801 census, the population had reached 60,822, in 1831 it was over 100,000 and by 1851, that figure had topped 230,000.[2] Much of the increase came from internal migration, especially from the hinterland.[3] Individuals and families experienced those twin

[1] G. Cherry, *Birmingham: A Study in Geography, History and Planning* (Chichester: Wiley, 1994), p. 32; E. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town: Birmingham and the Industrial Revolution* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998 revised edition), pp. 20-22.
[2] Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town,* p. 31; E. Hopkins, *Birmingham: the Making of the Second City, 1850-1939* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2001) p. 98; C. Chinn, 'The Peoples of Birmingham', in C. Chinn and M. Dick (eds), *Birmingham: the Workshop of the World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), p. 15. Growth slowed in the period of the Napoleonic Wars and immediately afterwards, but then recovered.
[3] Chinn, 'Peoples of Birmingham', p. 15.

features of rapid urbanisation – opportunity and dislocation; opportunity because of the expansion of types of manufacturing, retail and service jobs, alongside dislocation because of the loss of familiar patterns of everyday life.

Expansion took place both in the inner town and its periphery. When the Bond Street Chapel was built in 1787, just off Constitution Hill, it was on the edge of green fields. Edmonds would have witnessed the gradual expansion of the adjoining manufacturing district.[4] Better-off residents moved to the suburbs, including the new elite Calthorpe Estate in Edgbaston. Many districts in the town soon became crowded, gardens disappeared, and courts were built. Whittall Street, where Edmonds and his family had moved by the spring of 1832, was close to the gun quarter and quickly changed from an area of relatively smart houses to one crammed full of courts.[5] Although Birmingham had free-draining conditions and good-quality water, the cheek-by-jowl experience of housing and manufacture posed its own difficulties. Gordon Cherry suggests that although the town 'avoided the worst excesses of cellar-dwelling', unsanitary conditions prevailed.[6] Eric Hopkins agrees that while Birmingham could not compete with Liverpool and Manchester in the degree and extent of slum squalor, it had its share of housing deprivation.[7]

The expansion of industry and employment brought prosperity alongside the less tangible vivacity, civility and 'easy freedom' in social intercourse noted by William Hutton on his first arrival in the town.[8] At the higher end of the social scale were the rich merchants and manufacturers. Unlike the old established county towns,

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[4] See Maps, pp. ix.-xi.
[5] W. Dargue, *A History of Birmingham Churches from A to Y, St. Mary's Whittall Street* https://ahistoryofbirminghamchurches.jimdo.com/birmingham-st-martin-in-the-bull-ring/st-mary-whittall-street/ (accessed 22 Nov 2019).
[6] Cherry, *Birmingham*, *A Study in Geography, History and Planning,* p. 43.
[7] Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town,* pp. 120-2. See also Chapter Seven for conditions in the 1830s and 1840s.
[8] W. Hutton, *An History of Birmingham* 2nd ed. (Birmingham: E.P Publications, 1976 [1793]), p. 63.

Birmingham had few semi-resident aristocrats.[9] More prevalent were the medium-sized manufacturers and the hundreds of small masters employing a few journeymen and craftsmen. Then there were the artisans and small traders working for themselves, using the hand-tools which characterised Birmingham manufacturing.[10] Alongside these were the ranks of day labourers and outworkers. This, then, was a society where jobs were plentiful in periods of growth and where there was a significant middling layer. Hopkins and Cherry argue that despite differences in income, the prevalence of this middling layer and the ease of transition between artisan and small master contributed to the maintenance of social cohesion.[11]

Such prosperity, however, was hard won and neither universal nor continuous. George Holyoake, a young artisan in the 1820s and early 1830s, noted that where wages were guaranteed, the mechanical trades could provide independence, but for piece workers and those working in their small workshops there was no such security.[12] Hopkins acknowledges that irregularity of employment was a feature of working-class life throughout the early and mid-nineteenth century, affecting even skilled workers.[13] A number of factors could tip the balance: poor harvests, the trade cycle, wars and even changes in fashion could have an impact.[14] The variety of work helped Birmingham to avoid the worst of slumps as experienced in the textile towns, but there were still periods of extremely depressed trade in 1817-19, 1829-31 and

[9] Cherry, *Birmingham, A Study in Geography, History and Planning*, p. 41.
[10] Cherry, *Birmingham, A Study in Geography, History and Planning*, p. 39; Hopkins, *Rise of the Manufacturing Town*, pp. 40-60.
[11] Hopkins, *Rise of the Manufacturing Town*, p. 98; Cherry, *Birmingham*, *A Study in Geography, History and Planning*, p. 41.
[12] G. Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1906,), pp. 19-25.
[13] Hopkins, *Rise of the Manufacturing Town,* p. 154
[14] M. Dick, 'The City of a Thousand Trades 1700-1945', in Chinn and Dick, *Birmingham: the Workshop of the World,* p. 138**.**

1837-8 which contributed to social unrest.[15] Clive Behagg found an increasing polarisation between larger employers and small masters in the 1830s, with the former being able to use credit and marketing more effectively, increasing pressures on the small master and in turn contributing to a breakdown in cohesion and consensus.[16] New industries such as pen manufacture expanded and employment in domestic service grew: job availability increased, bringing prosperity but, argues Fiona Terry-Chandler, many of the trades employing women experienced intensification of work in mid-century. However, in the last two decades of Edmonds' life in the 1850s and 1860s, Birmingham, town of a thousand trades, and exporting its brassware world-wide, experienced sustained growth.[17]

In Asa Briggs' view, this pattern of development differed markedly from that of Manchester, but the degree of this difference is disputed. Modifications made to the picture of Manchester's industrial development acknowledge that smaller-scale businesses existed alongside large factories.[18] Recent explorations of business development and class formation in Victorian Birmingham have presented alternative views, with Francesca Carnevali and Jennifer Aston tending to confirm the Briggsian model while Smith, Bennett and van Lieshout find that the economies of both cities in the second half of the nineteenth century were more complex than the traditional picture suggests.[19]

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[15] These will be examined further in Chapters Four, Six and Seven.
[16] C. Behagg, 'Custom, class and change: the trade societies of Birmingham', *Social History,* Vol. 4, No.3, October 1979, pp. 455-480, p. 465.
[17] Dick, 'City of a Thousand Trades', pp. 142-**3;** Hopkins, *Rise of the Manufacturing Town*, pp. 93-94, 115-6; F. E. Terry-Chandler, 'Compulsory Industriousness: Working Conditions and Exploitation in Birmingham during the Industrial Revolution', *Midland History*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2019), pp. 71-84. See also Chapter Seven.
[18] A. Kidd, *Manchester: A History*, 4th ed. (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2011), pp. 13-29; Robert Poole has noted the continued prevalence of hand-loom weaving up until the 1840s, R. Poole*, Peterloo: The English Uprising* (Oxford: OUP, 2019), pp. 29-43.
[19] F. Carnevali, J. Aston, 'Victorian Capitalists and Middle-Class Formation: Reflections on Asa Briggs' Birmingham' in M. Taylor, *The Age of Asa* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 79-89; H.

Local government and representation

Leadership of the town until 1839 was in the hands of the upper middle-class elite, merchants, manufacturers and professionals. The county aristocracy took an interest in the town but were less involved than in some other areas.[20] Dennis Smith argues that in Birmingham there was not the 'gaping hiatus between county magnates and urban industrialists' which existed in Sheffield. He suggests that this produced a more balanced and open society, where no one group could monopolise an activity: 'association, negotiation, argument and compromise were the stuff of politics and business in the West Midlands'.[21] The advantages of this openness and proclivity for negotiation were, however, in civic matters, reserved for the town's upper middle-class elite. Consequently, those excluded from political and commercial influence sought reform in local government until incorporation in 1839.

The parish was the main instrument of local government. By convention, the High Bailiff was an Anglican, the Low Bailiff a Dissenter. After a brief hiatus, this tradition survived the breakdown of relations between the two groups that occurred at the time of the Priestley Riots of 1791. The High Bailiff's power to summon Town's Meetings put more influence in the hands of Anglicans, who were usually Tory by political inclination.[22] The Town's Meetings were usually dominated by elite voices

Smith, R. Bennett and C. van Lieshout, 'Entrepreneurship in Birmingham and Manchester, 1851-1911: A Tale of Two Cities?', *Midland History*, published on line 17 September 2020. DOI: 10.1080/0047729X.2020.1814641

[20] D. Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords: the Aristocracy in the Towns 1774-1967* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1980), pp. 149-151.

[21] D. Smith, *Conflict and Compromise: Class Formation in English Society, 1830-1914* (London: RKP, 1982), p. 34. See below for further comparisons and discussion of the cooperation between Dissenting and Anglican elements within the elite.

[22] R. Ward, *City-State and Nation: Birmingham's Political History, 1830-40* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2005), p.12 and pp. 15-16.

but they were, potentially, a source of more democratic representation and became a site of contest. The parish was also responsible for the administration of poor relief, for collection of the poor rate and the oversight of the workhouse. Short-time working and unemployment created a huge strain on the poor rates. Problems with workhouse administration and the efficient and proper dispersal of funds led to disputes, with George Edmonds, among others, seeking election to the Board of Guardians.[23]

The Street Commissioners, a self-selected group, for which there was a property qualification, set up by the Improvement Acts of 1769-1812, dealt with the environmental challenges associated with the town's fast growth and implemented improvements in streets, the market, public buildings and lighting which were essential to Birmingham business.[24] The oligarchical nature of the Street Commissioners came under challenge from the late 1820s onwards; the fact that they continued to have power and responsibility even after incorporation was a source of further tension. Night safety was preserved by the Watch, and overseen by a Watch Committee, appointed by the Street Commission.[25] Otherwise, the town was still dependent on the County of Warwick for most aspects of the maintenance of law and order. Both the Chief Constable and the magistrates were county appointments. Magistrates had responsibility for the maintenance of public order: they could utilise local constables, swear in specials, call out the yeomanry and request support from the military. They took decisions over the reading of the Riot Act. Some eight to ten magistrates were appointed who had responsibility for

[23] Ward, *City-State and Nation,* p. 16; Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town,* pp. 156-15. See Chapter Four.
[24] G. Cherry, *Birmingham*, p. 53.
[25] C. Gill, *History of Birmingham*, *Volume 1 Manor and Borough* (London: OUP, 1952), p. 178.

Birmingham, and they attended the Public Offices twice a week to deal with matters under their jurisdiction.[26] In the first few decades of the nineteenth century there was an increasing reliance on Anglican clergymen to act as magistrates.[27] The question of responsibility for policing became a major issue after incorporation.

Birmingham had no direct parliamentary representation until 1832 but relied on the two Warwickshire county MPs. If the town's merchants and manufacturers found ways of influencing local governance, they had a harder time when it came to national affairs. Until the mid-eighteenth century, the town lobbied the Warwickshire MPs, but by the time of the 1774 election, many wanted a distinctive MP for Birmingham, which led to a successful campaign for the election of Sir Charles Holte.[28] This arrangement could not provide a long-term solution and the Commercial Committee founded in 1783, followed by its off-spring, the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, engaged in a number of lobbying activities. The high point of collective organisation occurred in 1812 when a group headed by Thomas Attwood took a petition carrying 16,000 signatures to Westminster calling for the repeal of the Orders in Council.[29] The limitations of this system grew in the post-Napoleonic War period. For plebeian reformers, such as Edmonds, whose protests about social conditions centred on a corrupt political system, the lack of parliamentary representation became a significant issue. The town's manufacturers also found the lack of representation increasingly irksome, leading to renewed

[26] C. Pye, *A Description of Modern Birmingham in the Summer of 1818* (London, 1818).
[27] J. Saville, *The Consolidation of the Capitalist State* (London: Pluto Press, 1994), pp. 59-60. 40% of Warwickshire magistrates were Anglican clergymen by 1830. See Chapter Four for further details on the Birmingham magistrates.
[28] J. Money, *Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands 1760-1800* (Manchester: MUP, 1977), pp. 158-184; Ward, *City-State and Nation,* p. 18.
[29] Ward, *City-State and Nation,* p. 19. The Orders in Council forbade trade with continental Europe and this commercial warfare also affected the American trade. Birmingham manufacturers were hard hit.

pressure for the town to be granted parliamentary seats in the 1820s and the creation of the BPU in 1830.

Communications and print culture

Communications changed considerably in Edmonds' lifetime. The canal network was well-established in the 1780s, allowing the town to reach internal and overseas markets. Smith contrasts Birmingham's position at a hub of roads and canals with that of the more isolated Sheffield.[30] Even before the coming of the railways, travellers of means could reach London in a day, or overnight; mail and news travelled quickly. During the crises of the campaign for political reform in 1831 and 1832, Birmingham crowds gathered every morning to hear the news fresh from the overnight mail.[31] However, journeys to other destinations were slow: it took the BPU delegation to Scotland three days to reach Glasgow in May 1838.[32] The opening of the Liverpool-Birmingham railway line in 1838, and the line to London in 1839, ushered in a new era.[33]

Good communication with the capital meant that the London press and the national radical press were readily available in the town at booksellers and reading rooms. However, as Caroline Archer-Parré has shown, Birmingham had its own printers and vibrant print culture.[34] Radical publication was curtailed in the war years but re-emerged from 1816 inwards. Asa Briggs describes the plethora of newspapers and

[30] Smith, *Conflict and Compromise*, p. 34.
[31] See Chapter Six.
[32] C. Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union and the Movements for Reform in Britain 1830-39* (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1979), p. 126.
[33] Gill, *History of Birmingham,* p. 286.
[34] C. Archer-Parré, 'Printing and the Printed Word', in Chinn and Dick, *Birmingham: the Workshop of the World,* pp. 261-281.

magazines published in Birmingham between 1815 and 1832 and the way in which they both reflected and contributed to a lively literary and political culture.[35] The leading weekly newspaper *Aris's Gazette* was generally a supporter of Church and State although not openly aligned with either Tory or Whig interest.[36] From 1825, the *Birmingham Journal* joined the *Gazette* as a weekly, Saturday morning paper with up-to-date commercial and political news from the capital..[37] Originally under Tory editorship, the *Journal* became closely associated with the campaign for political reform from 1830 onwards.[38]

These local publications, together with the national press, were sold by small booksellers and read in newsrooms, both private and public.[39] The newsroom in Waterloo Street, opened in July 1825, carried local journals and London, provincial and foreign newspapers[40] Such newsrooms were mostly middle-class institutions but some booksellers and printers also kept rooms, or 'coffee rooms'. [41] Added to these reading venues were Birmingham's pubs – the chief social and debating venues of the day – which also stocked the press. When James Guest began to sell unstamped newspapers in defiance of the law in 1830, he offered them to publicans

[35] A. Briggs, 'Press and Public in Early Nineteenth-Century Birmingham', in A. Briggs, *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs, Volume 1* (Brighton: Harvester, 1985), pp. 106-137, originally *Occasional Papers of the Dugdale Society* No.8 (1949); T. Harman and W. Showell, *Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1885), pp. 318-319. The following paragraphs on print culture draw on S. Thomas, '"One of the most extraordinary publications which has ever appeared…": George Edmonds versus the Monthly Argus', in I. Cawood and L. Peters (eds), *Print, Politics and the Provincial Press in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), pp. 57-80.
[36] Briggs, 'Press and Public,' pp. 109-110.
[37] R.K. Dent, *Old and New Birmingham, Volume Two from 1760-1832* (Wakefield: E.P. Publishing, 1973), [1878-80], pp. 418-419.
[38] Briggs, 'Press and Public', pp. 111-112.
[39] J. A. Langford, *A Century of Birmingham Life from 1741 to 1841* Vol. 2 (Birmingham: E.C. Osborne, 1868), pp. 496-7.
[40] Dent, *Old and New Birmingham,* Vol.2, p. 430.
[41] *Edmonds's Weekly Register*, No. 19, 8 January 1820; BA&C, *Report of the Proceedings of the Public Dinner given in honour of Mr Wooler on his liberation from Warwick Gaol* (Birmingham, 1822). Edmonds' rooms and their function will be further discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

'with the newspapers of the week'. [42] Estimates suggest every newspaper reached ten to twenty people and might be read aloud.[43] Despite the fact that overall literacy rates were still restricted, there was a pool of educated workers, enough to sustain two Artisans' Libraries, with another attached to the Mechanics Institute. Sunday schools, especially those of the dissenting churches, educated children and young adults.[44] Edmonds grew up in a town that was provincial, but relatively well-connected to the capital and with a vibrant print culture.

Family and gender

Urbanisation and industrialisation impacted upon family structures and the position of women. For women of the growing middle class, there were opportunities for education and increased association. For others, town life meant work, often as part of a mixed family labour force. Rural life and domestic industry had depended on a family-based division of labour, but the new patterns of work meant long hours of labour in workshops, whether in or out of the home, often in poor conditions. Women's wages were the same or higher than those of other towns, but still about half those of men. Younger women benefited from increased independence and job mobility, but for the most part women remained in a subordinate position within the family.[45]

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[42] James Guest, 'A Free Press and How it Became Free', bound with W. Hutton, *A History of Birmingham* 6th edition (Birmingham: James Guest, nd), p. 495.
[43] Briggs, 'Press and Public', p. 117; R. Matthews, *The History of the Provincial Press in England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 63.
[44] Hopkins, *Rise of the Manufacturing Town,* pp. 161, 165-7. 29% of bridegrooms and 47% of brides still 'made their mark' on the register in the 1840s.
[45] M. Berg, 'What difference did women's work make to the Industrial Revolution?' *History Workshop,* No.35 (1993), pp. 22-44; K. Jenns, 'Work and Employment in Birmingham', in C. Chinn (ed.), *Birmingham: Bibliography of a City* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2003), pp. 200-206; S. Lewenhak, 'Women at work: subcontracting, craft unionism and women in England with special reference to the West Midlands, 1750-1791', in A. Wright and R. Shackleton (eds.), *Worlds of Labour: Essays in Birmingham Labour History* (Birmingham, 1983), pp. 1-17.

Recent debates about the existence and degree of separate spheres of activity for men and women of the middle class, and the extension of these patterns into the working class, have included reference to the Birmingham experience. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's analysis of the growth of separate spheres during the nineteenth century includes examples taken from Birmingham families.[46] This analysis has been challenged on several grounds: the fact that defined spheres existed from an earlier period, the continued participation of women in working and public life, and the porous boundaries between home and work.[47] In Birmingham there were many examples of women running their own workshops or acting as small traders. George Holyoake remembered this pattern of small trading: his own mother had a small button-making business: 'She was an entirely self-acting, self-managing mistress'. [48] Three Birmingham-based studies focus on the experience of work: Fiona Terry Chandler argues that women's work in a workshop-based economy was often hidden, while Kathleen Jenns and Jennifer Aston have uncovered evidence of considerable women's participation in business enterprise.[49]

[46] L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, (London: Hutchinson, 1987); C. Hall 'The Sweet Delights of Home', in M. Perrot (ed.), *A History of Private Life: from the Fires of Revolution to the Great War Vol. 4* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1990), pp. 47-94; C. Hall, 'Gender Divisions and Class formation in the Birmingham Middle Class, 1780 - 1850', in Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 94-107.

[47] R. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850: the Emergence of Separate Spheres* (London: Longman 1998)*;* K. Gleadle*,* 'Revisiting *Family Fortunes*: reflections on the twentieth anniversary of the publication of L. Davidoff & C. Hall (1987), Family Fortunes: men and women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850 (London: Hutchinson)', *Women's History Review,* Vol. 16, No. 5, 2007, pp. 773-782*;* H. Barker, *Family and Business during the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[48] Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life,* pp. 15-16.

[49] F. Terry Chandler, *Women, Work and the Family in Birmingham 1800-1870* (Unpub. PhD thesis, University of Birmingham. 1995); K. Jenns, *Female Business Enterprise in and around Birmingham in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Unpub. PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1997); J. Aston, 'Female Business Ownership in Birmingham, 1849–1901', *Midland History*, Vol. 37, No.2, 2012, pp. 187-206; Aston, *Female Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century England: Engagement in the Urban Economy* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016).

The maintenance of 'respectability' was a related concern which particularly affected those from the better-off artisan and small trader layers. With little time for family life, community entertainment, street life and social intercourse could prove a threat to established family patterns. The prevalence of prostitution shows that working women could find life precarious.[50] Preserving respectability became an important feature of social life, affecting arenas in which Edmonds operated: nonconformist church congregations, charitable endeavours, radical organisations and court appearances. Catherine Hall suggests that the role of women in evangelical nonconformist churches became more defined and increasingly centred on the family in the first half of the nineteenth century. The extent to which this applied to women in the Baptist churches is discussed below and in Chapter Three.[51]

Edmonds' sheer level of activity as a public figure is striking and he must have relied on considerable domestic support. The contradictory position of men, especially fathers, in relation to their domestic role and responsibilities has been explored by John Tosh, who has traced the growth of a domestic ideal in the nineteenth century, alongside the expectation to provide for the family, while Loftur Guttormsson and Valerie Sanders have noted that influential radical writers, Francis Place and William Cobbett, stressed the importance of family life.[52] The experience of several members of the Edmonds family tests these viewpoints.

The participation of women in radical activity and reform movements in Birmingham in the first half of the nineteenth century is under-researched. Clare Midgley has

[50] Hopkins, *First Manufacturing Town*, p. 171.
[51] Hall, 'The Sweet Delights of Home', pp. 62-64.
[52] J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999); L. Guttormsson, 'Parent-Child relations' in D.I. Kertzer and M. Barbagli (eds.), *Family Life in the Long Nineteenth Century, 1789-1913: The History of the European Family: Volume 2* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 251-281; V. Sanders, *The Tragicomedy of Victorian Fatherhood* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 1-27.

highlighted the vital role of the Female Society for Birmingham in the abolitionist campaign, Helen Rogers has analysed the role of the Female Political Union, 1838-40, and Nicola Gauld has traced the later growth of the women's suffrage movement.[53] Recent scholarship from Rogers, Katherine Gleadle and Sarah Richardson has drawn attention to the varying ways outside of the mainstream that women engaged in politics.[54] This thesis discusses the participation or absence of women in organised or informal political engagement and Edmonds' attitude towards this.

The religious culture of Birmingham

The extent to which Birmingham was a nonconformist town, and the relationship between its radical tradition and nonconformism, has been regularly discussed. Briggs considers that nonconformity's strength in Birmingham, particularly in the Victorian period, was one of the key characteristics of the city.[55] However, others such as Barrie Rose have questioned both how far this dominance can be traced back and to what extent it held good by the mid-nineteenth century.[56] Eighteenth-century Birmingham's first historian, William Hutton, linked its religious toleration and absence of a Charter to entrepreneurial growth, a view later supported by Samuel

[53] C. Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: the British Campaigns 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1992); H. Rogers, '"What Right have Women to Interfere with Politics?": the Address of the Female Political Union to the Women of England (1838)', in T. Ashplant and G. Smyth (eds.), *Explorations in Cultural History* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), pp. 65-100; N. Gauld, *Words and Deeds: Birmingham Suffragists and Suffragettes, 1832-1918* (Alcester: West Midlands History, 2018).
[54] H. Rogers, *Women and the People: Authority, Authorship and the Radical Tradition in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); K. Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender, and Political Culture in Britain, 1815–1867* (Oxford: OUP, 2009); S. Richardson, ***T****he Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in 19th-Century Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).
[55] A. Briggs, *A History of Birmingham, Volume 2, Borough and City 1865-1938* (London: OUP, 1952), p.3. In this thesis the term 'dissenters' is used for the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, 'nonconformist' is used for the mid-nineteenth century.
[56] R. Rose, 'Protestant Non-Conformism' in W. Stephens (ed), *A History of the County of Warwick: Volume Seven, the City of Birmingham* (London, 1964), pp. 411-434.

Timmins in 1865.[57] Peter Jones is sceptical about this 'free town myth' of Birmingham's origins and industrial development, pointing to a fusion of Dissenter and Anglican in the 'cultural substructures' of the Industrial Enlightenment.[58]

The meeting houses of 'Old Dissent', established in the early eighteenth century, were joined in the latter half by those of Baptists and Methodists.[59] At the start of the nineteenth century, there were some 17 places of worship for eight nonconformist denominations.[60] By the time of the 1851 census, nonconformists in Birmingham made up just under half of the churchgoers on a single Sunday. This proportion, however, was similar to that in England as a whole. Rose concluded that 'the conception of Birmingham as a nineteenth-century fortress of militant nonconformity' could not depend on a counting of heads.[61] Nevertheless, the nonconformist communities may have had an influence on the town greater than their numbers would suggest. Unitarian merchants and manufacturers held civic posts, for example as Street Commissioners, and participated in the Commercial Committee. The convention that a dissenter should occupy the post of Low Bailiff lasted, with only a few interruptions, from the eighteenth century until incorporation in 1838.[62] This was a higher degree of integration than in Liverpool, for example, where dissenters could

[57] W. Hutton, *An History of Birmingham*, (Birmingham, 2nd ed, 1783) esp. pp. 105-123; H. Smith 'William Hutton and the Myths of Birmingham', *Midland History,* Vol. 40, No. 1 (2015), pp. 53-73.
[58] P. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands* (Manchester, MUP, 2009), p. 184. Jones found that eighteenth-century dissenters from the Presbyterian and Quaker traditions were indeed disproportionately engaged in trade and industry and at a higher socio-economic level, compared to their Anglican counterparts, but argues that, at least until the 1791 riots, they were integrated culturally and in civil society. Both Anglicans and leading Dissenters practised 'rational religion', Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture*, pp. 175-188.
[59] 'Old Dissent,' refers to those who became Unitarians or Congregationalists, although Baptists are sometimes included.
[60] Rose, 'Protestant Non-Conformism', pp. 415-8. Rose noted Unitarians, Congregationalists, General and Particular Baptists, Methodists, Lady Huntingdon's Connexion, Swedenborgians and Quakers.
[61] Rose, 'Protestant Non-Conformism', pp. 426-7.
[62] Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment,* pp. 183-4.

find themselves 'cut off from the Anglican temper of the town'.[63] The combination of greater dissenter integration and involvement of the manufacturing upper middle-class in local government led to more harmonious local government relations than existed in Manchester.[64] Later in the nineteenth century, nonconformists occupied a significant place on the borough council and dominated the town's political landscape in the 1860s and 1870s.[65]

To what extent were nonconformists associated with radicalism? There are alternative perspectives about this relationship at a national level. From the eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, the maintenance of civil restrictions was a source of resentment. For dissenters, the belief that the individual possessed the competence to comprehend moral and religious truth meant that the state should not interfere with worship. At the same time, civil barriers reinforced social divisions.[66] Whether or not dissenters wished to be engaged in the political process, they were drawn into campaigning for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and for religious equality.[67] Alan Gilbert argues that alienation from the established Church contributed to the evangelical wave of 'New Dissent' in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[68] He found a high proportion of artisans amongst Baptists,

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[63] M. Power, 'The Growth of Liverpool', in J. Belchem (ed.), *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour, Essays in Liverpool History 1790-1940* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), pp. 21-37, p. 33.
[64] H. Smith, *Propertied Society and Public Life: The Social History of Birmingham, 1780-1832* (Unpub. PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 2013), pp. 258-277.
[65] A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: Odhams Press, 1963), pp. 197-203; R. Ward, 'Birmingham: a Political Profile, 1700-1940', in C. Chinn and M. Dick (eds.)*, Birmingham: the Workshop of the World*, pp. 171-174. Dawson himself came from a Baptist background although he left to form the Unitarian Church of the Saviour in 1845.
[66] R. Cowherd, *The Politics of English Dissent: The Religious Aspects of Liberal and Humanitarian Reform Movements from 1815 to 1848* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), p. 8; R. Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 184; M. Watts, *The Dissenters*: *Volume 1, From the Reformation to the French Revolution (*Oxford: OUP, 1978), pp. 483-4.
[67] After the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, nonconformists continued to press for further aspects of civil equality, including the removal of rates paid to the established Church. See below and Chapter Seven.
[68] A. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change* (London: Longman, 1976), pp. 1-12; Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 170- 175.

Congregationalists and Methodists in the Non-Parochial registers.[69] This, combined with aspects of belief and practice, contributed to a connection between dissenter church membership and radical attitudes: 'Methodists, Congregationalists and Baptists … propagated a spiritual status system which, while not radical in any political sense, cut across the hierarchical structures of the contemporary society.'[70]

However, the connection between dissent and radicalism was not straightforward. Not all dissenters were radical and not all radicals were dissenters. The campaigns against the slave trade and slavery and for factory reform were taken up by the evangelical wing of Anglicanism, while some nonconformist manufacturers embraced laissez-faire doctrines and opposed factory legislation.[71] Elie Halévy and Edward Thompson considered that Methodism acted as a conservative force amongst the emerging working class.[72] Recent scholarship, however, has tended to confirm the connection between nonconformity and radicalism.[73] In Birmingham, nonconformists supported campaigns for religious and civil equality, including the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and the abolition of church rates. They also resented the dominance of Tories and Anglicans in civic life: dissenters may have been allowed to share power but were always the junior partners. This contributed to the strong nonconformist presence in the campaign for a new corporation.[74]

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[69] Gilbert, *Religion and Society,* p. 63.
[70] Gilbert, *Religion and Society,* p. 83.
[71] R. Cowherd, *The Politics of English Dissent* pp. 8-9, 141-155.
[72] E. Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, Volume One: England in 1815* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961), pp. 389-427; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 385-411.
[73] J. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism: Non-Conformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Society* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990); H. McLeod, *Religion and Society in England 1850-1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996); E. Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit: Christian Radicalism in Britain from the Fall of the Bastille to the Disintegration of Chartism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); R. Floyd, *Church, Chapel and Party: Religious Dissent and Political Modernization in Nineteenth-Century England (*Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
[74] However, there were other aspects of Birmingham politics and society which affected political alignments in the 1830s, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

The extent to which the 1791 riots had a lasting effect in the town is contested. Towards the end of the 1780s, dissenters, especially Joseph Priestley, took up the campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts. The Anglican clergy and their supporters resisted and a 'Church and King' party coalesced.[75] A combination of renewed economic difficulties, resentment at the privileged position of the wealthier dissenters and popular hostility to Priestley led to the riots of 1791. Peter Jones argues that it was some years before full-scale cooperation between dissenters and Anglicans was restored.[76] Harry Smith and Jonathan Atherton have challenged the idea that nonconformists retreated ideologically or in civic activity, although Smith considers that the experience of the Priestley Riots did encourage the dissenting elite to seek harmonious relations in local government.[77] The long-term impact of the 1791 riots remains an open question: to what extent did the dissenting community continue to be wary of political engagement and how did the town's governing bodies react to disturbances? The strong Unitarian presence in the town and the degree of its connection with radical politics is a related question. Although the link between Unitarianism and the Civic Gospel in the late nineteenth century can be safely drawn, this connection is less certain for other periods. The high point of Birmingham's participation in the movement for political reform, the campaign led by the BPU, was headed not by Unitarians but by a coalition of currency reformers and popular radicals. The relative significance of Unitarian, Whig-leaning reformers in the

[75] Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment,* pp. 189-192; Langford, *A Century of Birmingham Life*, Vol 2, p. 475.
[76] Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, pp. 195-199.
[77] J. Atherton, *Rioting, Dissent and the Church in Late Eighteenth Century Britain: The Priestley Riots of 1791* (Unpub. PhD Thesis, University of Leicester, 2012), pp. 269-70; H. Smith, '"The blessedness of those who are persecuted for righteousness sake": The Role of "Candour" and the Priestley Riots in Birmingham Unitarian Identity,1791–1815', *Midland History*, Vol. 35, No. 2, Autumn 2010, pp. 174–90; Smith, *Propertied Society and Public Life,* pp. 276-7.

early-to-mid nineteenth century reform movements is considered in Chapters Four and Six.

Birmingham could not be described as a 'nonconformist town,' but it was a place where middle-class dissenters had an influence on both commercial and civic matters and, for the most part, freedom of worship was assured to dissenters of all creeds. The alignment between dissent and radicalism was not exact and the relationship between the two is further highlighted in the appropriate chapters.

The Particular Baptists

This section and the next examine the culture, beliefs and practices of the Particular Baptists, the church to which Edmonds belonged.[78] The Particular Baptists have been relatively neglected in discussions of the social and civic engagement of religious communities, and this is true for Birmingham as elsewhere. Their minority status, their plebian make-up, the lack of historical sources, all contribute to this. Historians of the Baptist churches concentrate on the development and growth of the church although John Briggs, in particular, has discussed the political engagement of Baptists at a national and local level.[79]

[78] The detail of church life in Edward Edmonds' Bond Street church is examined in Chapter Three.
[79] A. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Baptist Union, 1947); R. Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1986); R. Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage* (Wallingford: Baptist Union, 1990); J. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1994); M. Watts, *The Dissenters, Volume 2, The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: OUP, 1995); J. Briggs, 'Elite and Proletariat in Nineteenth-century Birmingham Nonconformity', in A. Sell, (ed) *Protestant Non-Conformists and the West Midlands of England* (Keele: KUP, 1996); G. Robson, *Dark Satanic Mills: Religion and Irreligion in Birmingham and the Black Country* (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2002). Baptists made up 1% of the population in England in the early nineteenth century and 4% at the religious census of 1851.

The roots of the English Baptist churches lay in the Puritan separatist movement of the seventeenth century, although this did not stop their eighteenth-century detractors from trying to associate them with the more radical continental tradition by labelling them 'Anabaptists'.[80] Unlike the General Baptists, the Particular Baptists were Calvinists who considered that only the elect were saved by God's grace. Both traditions jealously guarded congregational autonomy and shared an adherence to believers' baptism.[81] In the early eighteenth century, Baptist churches concentrated on belief and association, developing a pattern of church life: a regular weekly meeting, the enforcement of social discipline and congregational control of the ministry.[82] In the second half of the eighteenth century the Particular Baptists were influenced by Wesleyan evangelism and the preaching of the Calvinist George Whitefield.[83] Baptist thinkers wrestled with how the drive to evangelise could sit with Calvinist doctrine.[84] This was resolved by Andrew Fuller's influential letter, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, 1784, which opened the way to a wave of evangelical practice.[85] Particular Baptist adherents in England increased from 17,000 in 1790 to 24,000 in 1800.[86]

What factors, besides the subjective desire to spread the gospel, contributed to this period of evangelical expansion? The economic, social and political changes that encouraged Wesleyan Methodism also favoured Baptist growth. The rise of domestic industries, changes in the countryside, the growth of towns and breakdown of

[80] Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, p. 25, pp. 55-56.
[81] Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage*, pp. 11-12.
[82] Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century,* pp. 14-15; Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage,* pp. 60-62.
[83] Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 76-81.
[84] Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century,* p. 85.
[85] A. Fuller, 'The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation', in *The Complete Works of the Reverend Andrew Fuller, with a memoir of his life* (London, 1816), pp. 150 -179.
[86] Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 37.

traditional hierarchies, contributed to a changing religious culture. Baptist preachers were prepared to proselytise in plain language. They were not associated with the established order and frequently came from the same plebian social background as their church members.[87] Baptist chapels were independent and self-governing, they gave individuals a role within the community, for example by acting as deacons or running Sunday schools.[88] Chapels provided social support; preachers and lay deacons exhorted the faithful to avoid blasphemy, drunkenness and prostitution; the churches looked after their members in times of distress.[89] Women could participate in church meetings. The Church Books of the Bond Street and Cannon Street churches in Birmingham show that women were present in the meetings and given tasks of visiting other women, particularly helping those in need.[90] The degree of this participation, and the extent of responsibilities, came under discussion within Baptist circles.[91] For example, in 1810, a correspondent to the *Baptist Magazine* queried whether women should give an account of their faith in front of others, as men did, before becoming church members but other contributors defended the practice.[92]

Baptist theology and practice placed responsibility on the individual through the profession of faith and adult baptism. This was maintained, not without difficulty and dispute, alongside the concept of the elect. [93] The theological knife-edge walked by Particular Baptists created tensions within congregations and, one might speculate,

[87] Gilbert, *Religion and Society,* pp. 12, 63. Gilbert found that 63% of males of working age in the Baptist and Congregationalist registers were described as Artisans, figures similar to those for the Methodists.
[88] Gilbert, *Religion and Society,* pp. 87-90.
[89] Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century,* p. 6, and see Chapter 3.
[90] BA&C 405889, *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book*; BA&C BC2/4/1/1/1 *Cannon Street Church Meeting Minutes 1793-1801*.
[91] Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 278.
[92] *Baptist Magazine*, 1810, p. 388; *Baptist Magazine*, 1811, p. 326. The participation of women in church is further discussed in Chapter Three.
[93] Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century,* pp. 5, 9.

within individuals' consciousness and conscience. A member of a Particular Baptist congregation would wish to spread the gospel and at the same time be exhorted to hold fast to the idea of election, avoiding both Arminianism and Antinomianism.[94] Reports of these tensions were regularly seen in church minute books and are documented in the Bond Street Chapel records, explored in Chapter Three.[95]

What part did the Baptists, a minority church within nonconformism, play in political life and within radical campaigns? John Briggs has suggested that from the early eighteenth century 'Baptists had set up alternative strategies in relation to political developments – on the one hand a righteous radicalism and on the other a more cautious stance on the part of the leadership'.[96] Baptists, in common with other dissenters, were anxious to show their loyalty to the crown and joined in the 'loyal addresses' presented during the eighteenth century although they also participated in dissenting committees calling for the removal of the Test and Corporation Acts.[97]

Three significant Baptist thinkers maintained a radical strain of thought which probably influenced the thinking of Birmingham's pastors. Caleb Evans (1737-91) of the influential Bristol Broadmead chapel, attended by Edward Edmonds, defended the colonies over issues of taxation and representation.[98] The Particular Baptist minister Robert Robinson (1735-1790) was a founder member of the Cambridge Constitutional Society.[99] His *Principles of Nonconformity*, of 1778, argued that the

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[94] Arminianism rejected the Calvinist concept of predestination; Antinomianism was the belief that those of the elect need not obey biblical laws.
[95] *Bond Street Baptist Chapel Minute Book*, p. 84; BA&C 64258, T. Morgan, *A Plain Statement of the Faith and Practice of the Baptist Church meeting in Bond St Birmingham*, (nd c.1830). Some Baptists could not follow the new trends and formed the Strict and Particular Baptists. A gradual realignment took place between other wings of the Baptist church during the nineteenth century.
[96] Briggs*, The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 317.
[97] Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century,* p. 4.
[98] Floyd, *Church, Chapel and Party,* pp. 127-8.
[99] J. Stephens, 'Robinson, Robert (1735–1790), Baptist minister', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 September 2004,

people were the source of government and drew adverse comment from Edmund Burke.[100] Robinson was a friend and admirer of Joseph Priestley, visiting him in June 1790: he died during his stay and was buried in the Old Meeting House Burial Ground.[101]

Reverend Robert Hall junior (1764-1831) was also an admirer of Priestley, not on religious grounds but from 'commonality of opinion regarding civil society and for scientific achievement'.[102] He defended the French Revolution when other evangelical preachers urged caution.[103] Christianity, Hall argued, while not recommending any immediate direction in the affairs of government, encouraged its followers to cherish freedom. 'It teaches us to check every selfish passion, to consider ourselves as part of a great community…'[104] In 1793, Hall published *An apology for the freedom of the press and for general liberty* which asserted the right of public discussion, and defended the concept of the rights of man.[105] Hall's radical stance was modified in the Napoleonic period and his 1803 sermon, *Sentiments Proper to the Present Crisis*, attacked Napoleon's dictatorship, but his radicalism survived the war. In 1819, he published *An Appeal on Behalf of the Framework Knitters Fund,* which included an argument for a workers union, at a time when the

https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-23868 (accessed 23 October 2020).

[100] Hayden, *English Baptist History,* p. 89.

[101] BA&C, Catherine Hutton Beale, *A Memorial of the Old Meeting House and Burial Ground* (Birmingham, 1882).

[102] J. Morris, *Biographical Recollections of the Rev Robert Hall AM* (London, 1833), p. 56; R. Chadwick, 'Hall, Robert (1764–1831), Baptist minister', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-11982 (accessed 29 September 2020).

[103] Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century,* pp. 133-4. Congregationalist minister John Clayton published 'The Duty of Christians to Magistrates' in 1791 urging dissenting ministers not to preach on political topics.

[104] R. Hall, *Christianity consistent with a love of freedom: being an answer to a sermon, lately published by the Rev. John Clayton* (London, 1791).

[105] R. Hall, *An apology for the freedom of the press, and for general liberty: To which are prefixed Remarks on Bishop Horsley's sermon* (London, 1793). Hall traced the concept of the rights of man back to John Locke, a more respectable antecedent than Tom Paine.

Combination Acts rendered such a body unlawful.[106] In 1820 he delivered a sermon in Bristol entitled *The Signs of the Times*, arguing for an expansion of education, greater religious unity and measures to tackle poverty.[107] In 1822 he reissued *An Apology for the Freedom of the Press* apparently in a deliberate attempt to show he had not lost his belief in reform. This call for sovereignty of the people, a plea for annual parliaments and universal suffrage, puts him firmly in the camp of radical political reform.[108] Hall was probably one of the influences on George Edmonds' thinking. Hall's alignment of civil and religious freedom and defence of engagement in the political sphere would have provided encouragement to a young radical who was a practising Baptist. Edmonds, at the age of sixteen, may well have met Hall, who visited Birmingham in 1804, preaching a sermon for the Cannon Street church.[109] In addition, George's cousin Thomas Clarke Edmonds (1784-1860) was a close friend of Hall's.[110]

Baptists played a part in the movement for the abolition of the slave trade and a significant one in the campaign against slavery. Abolitionist sentiment was not universal, however: Calvinists were slow in taking up the cause compared to Wesley. George Whitfield became a slave-holder in America, while Baptists in Liverpool and Bristol were silent or equivocal in their attitudes, leaving an 'ambiguous legacy'.[111]

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[106] Hayden, *English Baptist History,* pp. 113-4.

[107] 'The Signs of the Times, Sermon preached at Bristol for the National Schools November 28th 1820', in O. Gregory (ed), *The Miscellaneous Works and Remarks of the Reverend Robert Hall with a Memoir of his life (London: Henry Bohn, 1849)* pp. 414-422; J. Briggs, 'Politics in the Pulpit: Robert Hall and the "Signs of the Times"', in J. Shaw, and A. Kreider (eds), *Culture and the Nonconformist Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1999), pp. 63-94.

[108] Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 374**.**

[109] BA&C MS 670, *Miscellaneous collection of manuscripts and printed items, many of them relating to the Edmonds family of Birmingham,* Printed hymn sheet to be sung by the children of Cannon Street Sunday School Birmingham, after a sermon to be preached by the Reverend Robert Hall AM of Cambridge, Sunday 15th July 1804.

[110] Morris, *Biographical Recollections,* p. 212.

[111] R. Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 10; P. Morden, *British Baptists and Slavery*, (Paper read at the Baptist World Alliance, 2007) available from bwa-baptist-heritage.org. (accessed 4 May 2020).

However, many Particular Baptists became committed abolitionists. In Robert Robinson's influential sermon *Slavery inconsistent with the Spirit of Christianity*, he insisted on an essential equality between human beings and linked the struggle against slavery to an overall concern with freedom and justice: 'In all civil and political debates let us always be on the side of liberty, not of licentiousness…but of just, equal and universal freedom.'[112] There are similarities in Robinson's approach compared to that of his friend Joseph Priestley who had preached his most significant sermon against slavery earlier in 1788.[113]

Baptist missionary expansion brought further ambiguity. Thomas Clarke Edmonds, in a sermon preached at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1819, defended missionary activity with a message of Christian universality:

> Others object that the evidences of Divine revelation are above the comprehension of heathens. To this I answer – the gospel is applicable to man as man. Who are they that are incapable of being moved by an exhibition of the nature and consequences of sin and by the doctrine of salvation...? Do not all possess a common nature? Are not all necessitous creatures? Is not the gospel designed for all?[114]

Here, T.C. Edmonds moves beyond seeing heathens as 'other' to a view of 'man as man'. However, this egalitarian view of missionary work went alongside colonial expansion. The contradictory role of Baptist missionaries has come under scrutiny from historians inside and outside the church. Baptist historians traditionally

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[112] R. Robinson, *Slavery inconsistent with the Spirit of Christianity: a sermon preached at Cambridge on Sunday Feb. 10th, 1788* (Cambridge, 1788). Quotation on p.25.
[113] M. Dick, 'Joseph Priestley, the Lunar Society and Anti-Slavery', in M. Dick (ed.), *Joseph Priestley and Birmingham* (Studley: Brewin Books, 2005), pp. 65-80.
[114] T. Edmonds, 'Christian Missions vindicated and encouraged. A sermon delivered in Lincoln's Inn Fields June 23rd 1819', in *Baptist Magazine,* 1819, p. 341.

celebrated the role of the missionaries in Jamaica who were attacked by white planters for aiding slave revolts.[115] Other work has challenged the dominant narrative, whether in giving greater prominence to the Sam Sharpe rebellion (1831-2) and the leadership provided by black Baptists, or in drawing attention to the fact that missionaries were instructed to avoid inciting rebellion.[116] Catherine Hall argues that while Baptist missionaries were courageous, they were nevertheless part of a wider imperial movement which saw itself as saving heathens and civilising savages.[117] This began as paternalism but as the century progressed, 'cultural differentialism' was replaced by biological racism.[118] Despite these contradictions, from the mid-1820s, the campaign against slavery was a political focus for Baptists, reflected in the pages of the *Baptist Magazine*.[119] Bond Street minister Thomas Morgan was on the founding committee of the Birmingham Anti-Slavery Society, and his son William played a prominent role in the campaign against the apprenticeship system in the 1830s.[120] Although the committee of the influential Birmingham Ladies Negro's Friend Society was dominated by women from the Quaker and Anglican communities, Mrs Birt, presumably the wife of Cannon Street minister Isaiah Birt, was a significant subscriber.[121] Edmonds' attitudes to slave resistance and the campaign against slavery reflected the more radical aspects of Baptist opposition to slavery and are discussed in later chapters.

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[115] Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, pp. 198-199. Underwood refers to the 'honourable part' that Baptists played in the movement against slavery and then the apprenticeship system.
[116] M. Watts, *The Dissenters, Volume 2*, pp. 445-8.
[117] C. Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), pp. 105-6, 300 – 309.
[118] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, pp. 363-366; George Dawson, a Baptist minister before his break-away, was a supporter of Thomas Carlyle and followed his views on race. A. Green, '"The Anarchy of Empire", Reimagining Birmingham's Civic Gospel', *Midland History,* Vol 36, No.2 (2011), p.165.
[119] *Baptist Magazine*, 1825-32.
[120] Hall, *Civilising Subjects,* pp. 309-325.
[121] BA&C MS 3173/2 (a), *First Report of the Ladies Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves*, *1826,* p. 23. For Reverend and Mrs Birt, see Appendix C.

The Particular Baptists in Birmingham

Birmingham had a significant, if small, Baptist presence.[122] The Cannon Street Chapel, a Particular Baptist church, was founded in 1736, the first Baptist church to be established in the town and had 217 members in 1785. Membership more than doubled during the ministry of Samuel Pearce (1766-1799), a popular evangelical preacher, from 1790 to 1799. In the decade that followed the chapel was enlarged to accommodate 900.[123] Cannon Street was joined by the Bond Street Chapel of Edward Edmonds (1750-1823), opened in 1786, and later by Newhall Street and Graham Street chapels. [124] These churches had, like their national counterparts, a plebeian character in their early years. Ronald Ram found that in 1781 only 16% of Cannon Street families appeared in the directories, compared to an average of 24% for the town and 61% of families from the Unitarian New Meeting.[125]

By the middle of the nineteenth century the Baptists had grown both nationally and locally. The 1851 church census puts the total Baptist attendance in Birmingham at 4,200, compared to Anglicans at 20,000 and Methodists at 6,000.[126] It was still a minority denomination but a more established one. John Briggs refers to the 'patrician pews' of the Cannon Street and Bond Street chapels in this period. Their

[122] The account here refers to the Particular Baptist presence.
[123] A Langley, *Birmingham Baptists Past and Present, prepared for the West Midland Baptist Association* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1939); E. Clipsham, 'Pearce, Samuel (1766–1799), Baptist minister', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-21690 (accessed 19 August 2020).
[124] Langley, *Birmingham Baptists*, pp. 67-183.
[125] R. Ram, 'The Social Evolution of Five Dissenting Communities in Birmingham 1750-1870', University of Birmingham PhD thesis, 1972, Table, p. 79. Ram worked with church documents of five Birmingham dissenting communities and with the town directories. The examination of the Bond Street chapel minutes in Chapter Three confirms this picture.
[126] Gill, *History of Birmingham*, p. 376.

congregation became middle class, while new foundations such as that led by Arthur O'Neill on Newhall Street, continued the tradition of artisan-led congregations.[127] Baptist chapels continued to closely guard their independence, as Thomas Morgan explained: 'We believe that a new testament church consists, not in any national or human establishment, but of a voluntary association of professing believers.'[128] This meant that Baptists were always set apart from the established church and always self-governing.

To what extent did Birmingham Baptists participate in civic and political life? Baptists were involved in the local meetings of deputies from the dissenting churches, 1789-90, whose aim was to support the national campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts.[129] Although a minority dissenting group, they played a significant role: the committee commissioned the printing of a sermon given by Samuel Pearce, minister of Cannon Street church, in February 1790, on the 'oppressive, unjust, and prophane nature, and tendency of the Corporation and Test Acts'.[130] Overall, however, according to Ram, Baptists were less engaged in civic affairs than were other dissenters. No members of the Cannon Street church were Street Commissioners although some were Guardians.[131] Ram suggests that this was largely because of their lower status, but also because the 'strength and energy of Calvinism' was channelled into the churches rather than into Birmingham's wider

[127] J. Briggs, 'Elite and Proletariat in Nineteenth-century Birmingham Nonconformity', pp. 71-98. For Arthur O'Neill (1819-1896), see Appendix C.
[128] Morgan, *Plain Statement*.
[129] Langford, *A Century, Vol. 1*, pp. 341-3.
[130] S. Pearce, *The oppressive, unjust, and prophane nature, and tendency of the Corporation and Test Acts, exposed, in a sermon, preached before the congregation of Protestant Dissenters, meeting in Cannon-Street, Birmingham, February 21, 1790. Printed at the Request of the Committee of the seven Congregations of the three Denominations of Protestant Dissenters in Birmingham* (Birmingham: J. Thompson, 1790).
[131] R. Ram, 'Influences on the Patterns of Belief and Social Action among Birmingham Dissenters between 1750 and 1870', in *Religion in the Birmingham Area: Essays in the Sociology of Religion* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham 1975), p. 86.

social and political life.[132] Thomas Potts, a merchant, was one member of the Cannon Street congregation who played a more prominent role, joining Attwood and others in the campaign against the Orders in Council of 1812.[133] John Briggs has a different emphasis from Ram and has stressed the considerable participation of local Baptists in community life. He singles out George Edmonds, William Morgan who was involved in the anti-slavery and anti-church rate campaigns, and Isaiah Birt, Cannon Street minister from 1813-1825, whose anti-war preaching during the French Wars brought him to the attention of the government.[134] Briggs also notes the radical appeal of O'Neill's Newhall Street chapel and the People's Chapel of Great King Street in the mid-nineteenth century, while individuals such as John Skirrow Wright and Reverend Charles Vince participated in various reforming projects.[135]

The non-appearance of Baptists on civic or commercial bodies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries need not imply that they were altogether disengaged from the political process or unaware of town affairs. While the activities of commercial and charitable institutions, populated with middle-class participants and aristocratic patrons, can be traced in press reports or documents, this is less the case for the records of friendly societies and clubs in which Baptist individuals might have been engaged. A few examples can be found in the only collection of Edmonds family manuscripts held by the Library of Birmingham; this relates to a branch of the Edmonds family based in Cannon Street church. John Edmonds was

[132] Ram, 'Influences on the Patterns of Belief and Social Action', pp. 29-44, p 35.
[133] Ram, 'Influences on the Patterns of Belief and Social Action', p. 255. Ram notes that Thomas Potts served as Low Bailiff in 1806, was a Guardian, and signed several Reform Meeting requisitions in 1827, 1831 and 1832.
[134] Briggs, 'Elite and Proletariat', pp. 72-73.
[135] Briggs, 'Elite and Proletariat', pp. 80-86. Briggs is cautious about the extent of Baptist involvement in the Civic Gospel movement.

indentured as a japanner in 1801 and appears in the Cannon Street book of 1808.[136] The collection includes several references to his involvement in sick clubs and savings societies, including the Old Union Mill, an enterprise which produced affordable flour.[137]

The extent to which fellow Baptists worked alongside George Edmonds and others in the popular radical campaigns of the 1817-20 period, and in the Birmingham Political Union, is highlighted in the thesis, wherever it can be detected. The Owenite William Pare, although later a well-known atheist, was brought up in the Baptist church. William Morgan was a co-worker of Edmonds. Sam Haycock was an active radical, as was Josiah Emes.[138] Being a member of one of the Baptist churches might not propel individuals into a leading position in political life: work, family and the concerns of church might take up most of their time and attention. On the other hand, the relatively democratic ethos of Baptist meetings, a Christian universalist belief in equality, and the felt exclusion and discrimination by the imposition of church rates might all incline members to sympathy for radical causes and their preparedness to be active at some level. These questions are explored in relation to the Bond Street Chapel and George Edmonds in the next chapter.

[136] BA&C MS 670, *Miscellaneous collection of manuscripts and printed items, many of them relating to the Edmonds family of Birmingham*, Indenture for John Edmonds, 1801; BA&C, BC 2/2/6/1 *Cannon St Church*: Printed list of members with addresses and occupations 1808, List of members 1809.
[137] BA&C MS 670, 22-23, Union Mill, document dated 20 April 1842; R.K. Dent, *The Making of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Allday, 1894), pp. 160-161.
[138] See Appendix C.

Chapter Three

EDMONDS' CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH (1788-1815)

This chapter explores the childhood and youth of George Edmonds, examining how his family and faith influenced his beliefs and actions. Edmonds was the son of a pastor, a position of some privilege, but his father's congregation at the Bond Street Chapel was a plebeian one. The chapter explores this background further, examining the occupations of Edmonds' family and neighbours. It considers the influence of the Reverend Edward Edmonds, asking to what extent his attitudes to faith and education might have influenced George. It asks how the culture of the Particular Baptists, as expressed in the records of the Bond Street congregation, would have framed George's development and how it might have contributed to his radical outlook. The chapter also explores Edmonds' activities as a young man, his work, studies and wider interests.

Previous treatments of Edmonds' life have concentrated on his radical politics, work as Clerk of the Peace and interest in philology, giving only brief assessments of his chapel and family background and early life.[1] Discussion of the connections between nonconformism and radicalism in Birmingham have tended to concentrate on the larger or more influential denominations.[2] Historians of the Baptist churches in Birmingham, Arthur Langley and Alan Betteridge, do explore the social background of congregations but concentrate on the growth of the church itself with limited

[1] E. Edwards, 'George Edmonds', in *Personal Recollections of Birmingham Men* (Birmingham, 1877); *BJ,* 4 July 1868*; Midland Counties Express* and *ABG,* 4 July 1868, collected in BA&C, Birmingham Scrapbook Vol. 1, Pt. 2A; 'George Edmonds and George Edmonds', *Notes and Queries,* 6th Series, IV, 6 Aug 1881 and 10 Sep 1881; L.A. Woodward, 'Edmonds, George (1788-1868)' in J. Baylen and N. Gossman (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Radicals, Vol. Two 1830-1870* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1984).

[2] Discussed in Chapter Two.

discussion of its wider impact, although John Briggs has shown that Baptist individuals were involved in radical activity.[3] In the following discussion, the biographical approach allows a new exploration of the relationship between the culture of a Baptist chapel, its community and its impact on Edmonds' development as a thinker and a radical.

Primary sources used include records from the Bond Street and Cannon Street Chapels. The *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book*, which covers 1786 to 1809, is the main source used to explore chapel life.[4] Infractions and disputes receive more coverage than the everyday smooth running of the chapel, but with this caveat, it provides a valuable source not only of Particular Baptist practice but of the wider lives of this largely artisan and working-class section of Birmingham's manufacturing community. The first volume of the *Diaries of Joseph Dixon* is the other main primary source used. The diaries, kept by a member of the Cannon Street church, give an insight into the life of a young artisan, and the first volume describes Dixon's friendship and collaboration with Edmonds.[5] Genealogical data, combined with directories, have been used to explore the occupations and connections of the wider Edmonds family. Two sources provide critical views of Edmonds' behaviour as a young man, a satirical ballad, *The Orator Unmasked* (1819) and Joseph Allday's *Monthly Argus* (1831).[6] The poem, produced during the height of the pamphlet wars

[3] A. Langley, *Birmingham Baptists Past and Present* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1939); J. Briggs, 'Elite and Proletariat in Nineteenth-century Birmingham Nonconformity,' in A. Sell (ed.), *Protestant Non-Conformists and the West Midlands of England* (Keele: KUP, 1996), pp. 71-98; A. Betteridge, *Deep Roots, Living Branches: A History of Baptists in the English Western Midlands* (Kibworth Beauchamp: Matador, 2010). See Chapter Two for Baptist engagement in civic and political activity.
[4] BA&C 405889, *Bond Street Baptist Chapel Minute Book 1785-1828*. The latter date comes from the last entry in the list of names; the minutes end in 1809 but do cover the period when Edmonds was growing up.
[5] CRL MS 14 *Journals and Notebooks of Joseph Dixon* c 1811-1840s.
[6] M. Meek (pseudonym), *The Orator Unmasked: a new serio-comic ballad by Moses Meek* (Birmingham, 1819); *Monthly Argus and Public Censor* 1829-33.

between radicals and loyalists in 1819, is clearly hostile, and may exaggerate Edmonds' rebellious tendencies, but provides a useful counterpoint to the positive account of Edmonds' youth given by Edwards.

The chapter begins with a focus on the immediate and extended Edmonds family, especially the life of Reverend Edward Edmonds. The next section explores the community and culture of the Bond Street Baptist Church augmenting the overview of the Particular Baptists provided in Chapter Two. This is followed by sections which explore Edmonds' early interaction with the world beyond the immediate circle of his father's church: time spent in Blockley, Gloucestershire and in Shrewsbury, his interest in print technology and his first years as a married man and schoolmaster.

Difficult economic and social circumstances surrounded the family and chapel community in this period. The outbreak of war with France marked the onset of a long period of depressed trade in Birmingham. Within a few months, an estimated 10,000 were out of work. Numbers in the workhouse rose by 75% between 1792 and 1793 and those dependent on outdoor relief reached 2,500 in 1795. Distress provoked several occurrences of bread rioting. While gun and sword manufacturers benefited from the war economy, most trades were adversely affected; Birmingham had a high dependence on overseas trade, while the domestic market also shrank.[7] This is the backdrop to Edmonds' family and church upbringing.

[7] M. Rowlands, *The West Midlands from AD 1000* (Harlow: Longman,1987), p. 212; E. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town: Birmingham and the Industrial Revolution* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), pp. 70-75, p. 157; P. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands* (Manchester, MUP, 2009), p. 38.

The Edmonds family

George Whitfield Edmonds (1788-1868) was born on 10 March 1788, in Birmingham. He was the son of Edward Edmonds, the founding pastor of the Bond Street Baptist Chapel, and of Edward's second wife, Sarah.[8] He was almost certainly named after the evangelical preacher George Whitefield, or Whitfield (1714–1770).[9] The fifth child of the minister's large family, George grew up in the family house in Kenyon Street.[10] Both Bond Street and Kenyon Street were on the edge of the manufacturing area, just north of the town centre.[11]

Edmonds was raised in a strong religious culture, where dissenting Christianity provided the dominant influence. The Edmonds family were stalwarts of the Particular Baptist community in Birmingham: J.W. Showell, nineteenth-century historian of the Baptists in Birmingham, noted that the family 'were remarkable for their piety'.[12] George's grandfather, Amos Edmonds (1722-1797), a gun-barrel maker, was a leading member and deacon of the church on Cannon Street (Figure. 3.1).[13] Ronald Ram's research showed that that the majority of Cannon Street

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[8] TNA; General Register Office: *Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths surrendered to the Non-parochial Registers Commissions of 1837 and 1857*; Class Number: RG 4; Piece Number: 3113, Birmingham, Bond Street (Baptist), 1775-1837, Register of Births and Burials, **(**Hereafter RG4/3113) George Whitfield Edmonds b. 10 March 1788. From**:** Ancestry.com. *England & Wales, Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Registers, 1567-1970* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013. All subsequent BMD sources have been accessed via Ancestry.com, http://www.ancestry.co.uk, except where otherwise stated, and their original sources are referenced.

[9] Schlenther, B., 'Whitefield, George (1714–1770), Calvinistic Methodist leader', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-29281 (accessed 5 May 2020). Whitefield was pronounced 'Whitfield,' and often spelt that way.

[10] Edwards, 'George Edmonds'; *Thomson and Wrightson New Triennial Directory, 1808.* This has Rev. Edward Edmonds in Kenion St, the first appearance in the directories.

[11] See Map 1, p. viii.

[12] Angus Library 15233608, J. Showell, 'Early History of the Baptists in Birmingham', in *Report of the Recognition Services held on Tuesday October 26th and Thursday October 28th 1856 on the settlement of the Reverend Isaac Lord as pastor of the Baptist church and congregation of Cannon St Birmingham*, (Birmingham: Showell, nd, 1856?), p. 31.

[13] See Appendix C.

members came from modest backgrounds, with deacons being slightly more prosperous.[14] Several of Amos's children, George's uncles and aunts, resided locally, working as artisans or small masters.[15] Joseph Edmonds was a gun-barrel filer, Samuel Edmonds, a jeweller, and Amos's elder daughter Mary Edmonds married Joseph Bower, who worked in the buckle trade. Daughter Elizabeth married William Muckley, toy-maker.[16] Youngest son Amos Edmonds junior (c.1753-1834), a 'gun filer and dealer in iron weaponry' – a lucrative trade in war-time Birmingham – was the most successful in business.[17] Three of Amos's sons were called to the ministry. Thomas Edmonds (c.1746-1834) was minister in several churches before his final posting at Leominster. John Edmonds (1752-1823) left Birmingham to be minister at Guilsborough, Northamptonshire, in 1781. One of his children, Thomas Clarke Edmonds (1784-1860), George's cousin, had a distinguished career as a Baptist preacher.[18] The extent to which the Birmingham Edmondses kept in touch with these out-of-town relations is unknown, but the family would have been connected through the church.[19] George's extended family strengthened a culture which emphasised hard work, achievement and Christian commitment – traits which would have impressed themselves on the young Edmonds.

[14] R. Ram, 'Influences on the patterns of Belief and Social Action among Birmingham Dissenters between 1750 and 1870', *Religion in the Birmingham Area: Essays in the Sociology of Religion* (University of Birmingham, 1975), pp. 29-44.
[15] See Map 1, p. viii, Appendix A, Family Trees and individual details in Appendix C.
[16] See Appendix C, Edmonds family and Muckley Family.
[17] See Appendix C.
[18] See Appendix C for the Edmonds ministers. Thomas Clarke Edmonds' egalitarian version of spreading the gospel is referred to in Chapter Two.
[19] Thomas Clarke Edmonds visited Birmingham in 1826, preaching in support of the Baptist Missionary Society. *ABG,* 17 and 24 July 1826.

<u>Figure 3.1</u> Cannon Street Chapel

Source: W. Finnemore, *The Story of a Hundred Years* (Oxford: OUP, 1923)

George's father, Edward Edmonds (1750-1823), was a jeweller by trade but in October 1779 he had been 'set apart for the ministry by a day of fasting, prayer and laying on of hands' at Cannon Street Church.[20] Edward was sent to the Bristol Baptist College, the leading training institution for Baptist ministers, where a broad curriculum was offered which included science, logic and philosophy as well as theology and the classics.[21] However, according to Showell, Edward Edmonds, although a man of strong intellect, had a mind 'not congenial to the study of Latin

[20] Showell, 'Early History of the Baptists in Birmingham', p. 30.
[21] R. Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1986), p. 125; R. Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage* (Wallingford: Baptist Union, 1990), pp. 74-77; A. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Baptist Union, 1947), pp. 130-131.

and Greek', and he left Bristol after only a short course of study.[22] On return to Birmingham, he worked at his trade while preaching in streets and courts and in a private house in Needless Alley. Edward Edmonds' own account of this period gives an insight into the background and determination of his congregation. Seventeen of them, 'all of whom got their bread by the sweat of their brow', opened a subscription for a new meeting house which rapidly raised £50 towards a new chapel. Work began early in 1786 and the church in Bond Street was opened on 15 November of that year.[23]

Reverend Edmonds (Figure. 3.2) was an effective preacher, according to Showell.[24] A biographical sketch, written for church members in 1866, agreed: 'In this pulpit he was singularly powerful. He wielded an influence which far more cultured men failed to do... His language was simple, idiomatic and Saxonic, like Bunyan's...his illustrations were very homely.'[25] A contributor to the *Birmingham Journal* in 1856 remembered hearing Mr Edmonds preach: 'He had the power of producing laughter, tears and intense excitement.'[26] This skill, developed in the streets as well as the pulpit, must surely have been an example for his son George. His father's behaviour as a pastor would likewise have been an influence: Reverend Edmonds 'felt a parental interest in all the affairs of the people. He visited, he advised and influenced them in private. The very children felt they had a friend in him. He went about like portable sunshine.'[27] His was a moderate approach to doctrine and some stricter

[22] Showell, 'Early History of the Baptists in Birmingham', p. 31.
[23] *Bond Street Baptist Chapel Minute book ,* pp. i-vi; Showell, 'Early History of the Baptists in Birmingham', p. 31; BA&C 246405, R. Gray, 'The Birmingham District', in *Records of an Old Association: the 250th Anniversary of the Midland Baptist Association* (MBA, 1905). There had been delicate negotiations with the Cannon Street Church to enable this move.
[24] Showell, 'History of Cannon Street Church,' p. 31.
[25] BA&C 247538, *The Literary Palaestra* published for Bond St Institute No 4 Oct 1866, pp. 84-85.
[26] 'Anecdotes of Old Mr Edmonds', *BJ,* 19 November 1856.
[27] *The Literary Palaestra,* p.85. This description contrasts with the impression given in his portrait, Figure 3.2, but perhaps the artist considered a minister should have a serious countenance.

Calvinists in the church expressed disapproval, but other evidence suggests that Reverend Edmonds managed to negotiate the potentially challenging path of an evangelical Calvinist.[28]

Figure 3.2 Reverend Edward Edmonds

Source: A Langley, *Birmingham Baptists Past and Present* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1939)

Edward Edmonds made a modest living as pastor: the chapel agreed to pay him one and a half guineas a week in 1792, an amount that rose to two guineas in 1795, and three guineas in 1801.[29] There it seems to have remained with the advent of the lean war years. This was a good income compared to most of his congregation, but not a great deal more than that earned by highly skilled artisans and less than that of a

[28] Andrew Fuller to James Deakin, 5 April 1803, reproduced in A. Fuller, 'Andrew Fuller and James Deakin, 1803', *Baptist Quarterly,* Vol. 7, No. 6 (1935), pp. 326-333. Some members left to join the Swedenborgian New Jerusalem Church. Fuller was asked to visit the Bond Street Chapel but does not seem to have been alarmed. In one sermon Edmonds recounted how he had been stopped by a man who dared him to kill himself if he were so sure of salvation. Edmonds declared to his congregation that this was nothing but the devil tempting him. *BJ,* 19 November 1856.
[29] *Bond Street Baptist Chapel Minute Book,* pp. 58, 98, 236.

typical modest country living in the established church.[30] Household finances would have had to be carefully managed in the Edmonds household, especially as there would have been up to six dependent children at any one time in the first two decades of Reverend Edmonds' pastorship. Two children, Elizabeth and Ephraim, were from Edward's first marriage.[31] Edward's second wife, Sarah Bromfield, George's mother, was from the Cannon Street congregation and was the daughter of a gun-stocker.[32] There were five sons and five daughters of this marriage: the deaths of four of them between 1796 and 1807 testify to the challenges of the time.[33] When George's half-brother Ephraim died in 1813, George became the oldest son, with all the attendant responsibilities.

George's younger brother, James Harvey Edmonds, married a Whardinna Hancock and, after a period trading in the United States, settled locally. George's next sister, Sarah Bromfield Edmonds, may have been the stay-at-home daughter and later resided with George and his wife Patience until a late marriage. Hannah Maria Edmonds, who married James Silcock in 1821, also figures in George's later responsibilities.[34] Two other children had radical connections: George's youngest

[30] According to the evidence given by Birmingham manufacturers appearing before the Commons Committee investigating the Orders in Council in 1812, a second-rate wage was 25s-30s, while the most skilled artisans could command £2-£3 in good times. E. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town: Birmingham and the Industrial Revolution* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), p.152. In *Sense and Sensibility*, when Colonel Brandon offers Edward Ferrars the Delaford living of £200 a year, he did not consider it enough to support a wife although Mrs Jennings and Eleanor think it will be enough to allow Edward and Lucy Steele to get married when added to Edward's existing £100 a year. J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, published 1811 (Oxford: OUP, 1923), pp. 282-292.

[31] RG4/ 3113*, Birmingham, Bond Street (Baptist), 1775-1837, Register of Births*. Edward's first wife Martha died sometime after Ephraim's birth in 1779; her name is known from the birth records for her children.

[32] *Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937*, St Philips, DRO 25, M45. 28th April 1784, Marriage of Edward Edmonds and Sarah Bromfield. See Appendix C for Sarah Bromfield and her father. His trade was a skilled one and Sarah was a beneficiary in his will.

[33] RG4/ 3113, *Birmingham Bond Street (Baptist), 1775-1837, Births and Burials,* Enoch b.10 Sep.1786, d. 8th April 1796; Ann b. 5 April 1800, d. September 1802; Maria b. 21 May 1802, d. February 1803; John Bunyan b.19 February 1785, d. March 1807.

[34] See Chapter Nine and see Appendix C for the Edmonds children.

brother, Edward Amos Edmonds, became a radical journalist..[35] Mary Ann Edmonds married mathematical instrument maker, Samuel Haycock, from the Bond Street congregation who was active as a radical in the 1830s and one of the first town councillors.[36] Reverend Edmonds ministered at Bond Street until his death in 1823, with Thomas Morgan as co-pastor for the last period. Sarah Edmonds died in August 1820.[37] The *Baptist Magazine* reported that Edward's funeral attracted several hundred mourning friends and several thousand spectators, testifying to his status in the wider community.[38] George Edmonds inherited close family support, considerable responsibilities and radical connections from his family and the impact of these is discussed in later chapters.

To what extent was Reverend Edmonds able to provide a rounded education for his family? The hostile account given in the ballad *The Orator Unmasked* suggests that George did attend school but was excluded for bad behaviour, but even if this was the case, Edward Edmonds was capable of providing a home education.[39] According to Eliezer Edwards: 'Under his father's care George Edmonds received a really good education and became an excellent classical scholar.' [40] The obituary in the *Birmingham Journal* puts a different slant on this instruction: it would have comprised 'some "smattering" acquisition of the dead languages, with the more useful learning of English grammar, writing, and arithmetic'. [41] The level of education George

[35] RG4/ 3113, *Birmingham Bond Street (Baptist), 1775-1837*, *Births and Burials.* Edward Amos b.23 March 1794. His life intertwines and contrasts with that of George. See Appendix B, Edward Amos Edmonds.
[36] See Appendix C, Samuel Haycock.
[37] RG4/ 3113, *Birmingham Bond Street (Baptist), 1775-1837, Register of Burials*: Sarah, 5 Aug 1821, Edward, 18 Mar 1823. The date for Sarah's death in the Bond Street Register is inaccurate, see Chapter Five.
[38] *Baptist Magazine,* Vol. XIV, 1823, p. 208.
[39] *The Orator Unmasked*, see Figure 3.3. Home education was favoured by the middle classes in this period, C. Birchenough, *The History of Elementary Education in England and Wales from 1800 to the Present Day* (London: W.B. Clive, 1920), 2nd ed., p. 5.
[40] E. Edwards, 'George Edmonds'.
[41] *BJ*, 4 July 1868.

received from his parents was probably somewhere in between. Edward Edmonds' time at the Bristol Academy, even if curtailed, would have prepared him to supervise the education of his children, and his wife Sarah would have received at least an elementary education, enabling her to lend support.

If Edward Edmonds had shown some impatience with formal learning at the Bristol College, he was nevertheless committed to educational improvement. A contributor to a local 'Notes and Queries' column suggested: 'His (George's) love of books was very early shown, and from his father, doubtless, this literary taste was acquired.'[42] Another memorialist remembered an Edward Edmonds sermon on the pleasure of books: 'What a noble place is a well-stored library. There you have the innermost thoughts of the noblest minds….' Quoting Machiavelli on the pleasures of a library, Reverend Edmonds concluded that if profane books were worth studying, 'how much more ought we to feel about the blessed Bible'.[43] It is possible that Edward Edmonds wanted one or more of his sons to follow him into the ministry, but none of them took this path. The Edmonds' daughters probably received the relatively extensive education common to middle-class non-conformist women. On balance it seems likely that George received a rounded childhood education and had access to a good family library which enabled him to expand his knowledge, preparing him for his later public life.

This description of George's family gives some idea of the bustling household and community that surrounded him. The Edmonds children led busy lives with chores and duties for home and church. They experienced the death of siblings and shared in the hardship of the war years, although their father's income would

[42] BA&C, Birmingham Scrapbook, Volume One, Part Two (A) p. 32. Cutting, 11 July 1868.
[43] 'Anecdotes of Old Mr Edmonds', *BJ,* 19 September 1856.

have protected them from the worst effects of deprivation. To gain a fuller picture of this milieu, the next section explores the culture of the Particular Baptists as expressed in the life of the Bond Street Chapel.

The Bond Street Chapel

The *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book* affords glimpses of chapel life, of an apparently well-ordered and close-knit community living through turbulent times, facing hardship, overseeing the moral and spiritual well-being of its members and imposing a degree of social control .[44] This culture emphasised high personal standards of morality and responsibility for the behaviour of others and, when combined with the support and expectations of his family, framed Edmonds' upbringing.

The Church Meeting, led by the deacons, managed church business, organised visits to members, helped those in distress and tried to overcome theological differences, calming squabbles and urging loyalty to the church. Those sent on pastoral visits both remonstrated with backsliders and encouraged them to improve. Improprieties such as drunkenness and gambling appear frequently in the minutes with men the most frequent miscreants although women too were charged with drunkenness. One feels some sympathy with the singers who were discharged because of their habit of going to the pub after meetings on Sundays.[45] It was with an almost audible sigh that the minute-taker reported that 'Sister Molony had again been too much in liquor' in January 1796. Hypocrisy was particularly frowned on: when Abram Glasnost was cut off from membership, not only had he been drunk on

[44] *Bond Street Baptist Chapel Minute Book.*
[45] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book,* 7 March 1796, p. 125.

a Saturday but had solemnly sat down to communion the next day.[46] Others were unrepentant: in September 1795, Moses Sharp was cut off having declared that he was going to carry on visiting the public house and, if opportunity offered, 'to sing carnal songs with the ungodly'.[47] The minister's own children were not exempt from punishment. In July 1808, the deacons reported that James Harvey Edmonds had been seen at the Vauxhall pleasure gardens and they had remonstrated with him for visiting such a place of 'worldly amusement'. Despite promising to do better, he had been seen the following week in a pub, gambling, and was unrepentant when challenged. This won him a six-month suspension.[48] There is no mention of George in the minutes which suggests that, even if he demonstrated the restlessness which is implied in *The Orator Unmasked*, George did not give the deacons the kind of cause for alarm provided by his brother.

Women were regular attendees at Church meetings and were sometimes asked to visit other women, for example, to calm disputes. However, none were deacons and the way in which their behaviour was monitored was undoubtedly gendered. On 1 June 1795 Brother Blakemore raised the case of Sister Pearson, 'whom they had often reprov'd for being so much from her own home and of course being very troublesome in going to friends' houses, neglecting her family, to the no small reproach of the church amongst her carnal neighbours'.[49] On such occasions members might be suspended for a while before being brought back into full membership. Other sins incurred immediate and permanent exclusion. There were several pregnancies out of wedlock, including the case of Mrs Upton who was cut off

[46] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book*, 10 May 1791, p. 35.
[47] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book*, 7 September 1795, p. 114.
[48] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book*, 25 July 1808, p. 338. James Edmonds would be 18.
[49] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book*, 1 June 1795, p. 107.

when found pregnant despite her husband having been in the army for several years.[50] Male behaviour in the family was also checked where it reached the gaze of the public. In July 1808, Thomas Clews was cut off having shown no genuine repentance when charged with 'beating his wife who had given no cause, before his shopman, and swearing and drinking'.[51]

Sometimes the *Minute Book* shines a light on underground transgressive behaviour. In July 1796, the conduct of Joseph Doley came before the meeting when accusations were brought 'of a crime the Apostle exhorts that we let it not be named'. Female and unmarried friends were asked to withdraw for the sake of decency when the case was heard – but it took three hours discussion before, of the 34 members present, 28 considered him guilty and he was cut off for base immorality.[52] In June 1798, Brethren Woodhill and Lowe were appointed messengers to charge Mrs Calkin 'with being dressed in men's cloths and appearing so in public, also encouraging servants in their dishonesty by receiving the property of their masters'.[53]

The theological challenges facing Particular Baptists are well attested in the minutes. Considerable efforts were made to talk round doubters; for example, in September 1799 Brothers Molony and Wakeman talked to 'friend Cannon' and found him 'confirmed in the doctrine of universal restoration and redemption'.[54] Church governance was another hotly disputed question: a fierce argument broke out in 1803 over the power to decide who could speak from the pulpit. The church meeting,

[50] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book*, 16 May 1796, p. 130.
[51] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book*, 11 July 1808, p. 337.
[52] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book*, 4 July 1796, pp. 132-3.
[53] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Boo*k, 11 June 1798, p. 171.
[54] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book*, 16 September 1799, p. 198.

jealously guarding its own privileges, resisted an attempt by the deacons to take these decisions themselves.[55]

The plebeian background of most of the chapel members, and the challenges they faced, are confirmed in the *Minutes*. Many entries clearly refer to working men and women, with women working as servants and hands. Members are reproved if they try to cheat their employers. Nancy Murden was charged with defrauding her Master, Mr Simcox, and after several protestations, she was cut off.[56] One better-off family were the Dockers, who were slate manufacturers. 'Mr Docker' is given the title while most members are simply named, or titled Brother or Sister.[57] Many difficulties reported in the *Minutes* reflect the background of poverty, distress and unrest and at least one church member was in the thick of the latter. In May 1791, Mrs Jenkins was cut off for rioting and 'setting herself at the Head as ringleader'.[58] This report, several months before the anti-Dissenter Priestley Riots, reminds us that disturbances, usually precipitated by economic matters such as bread prices, were not uncommon. There were many cases of people pleading poverty to explain absence from Sunday worship. Such cases were dealt with sympathetically, but poverty could not excuse dishonesty. In 1797, Sister Wilkes and Brother Blakemore were sent to visit Mrs Kidson, who had left her rented premises without paying.[59] By 1800, a year in which conditions were such that soup kitchens were re-established in

[55] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book*, February – March 1803, pp. 273-280.
[56] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book,* 6 September – 13 November 1787, pp. 6-7.
[57] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book*, 14 March 1803, p. 277; *Wrightson's Triennial Trade Directories of Birmingham* for 1815, 1818, 1823. Mr Docker allowed the stand to be erected in front of his premises at the bottom of Newhall Hill for the first meeting in January 1817. See Chapter Four.
[58] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book,* 24 May 1791, p. 35.
[59] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book,* 18 September 1797, p. 160.

the town and the poor rates doubled, the church recommended that its better-off members should help the less fortunate in the congregation.[60]

Chapel members and their pastor felt threatened by the atmosphere of hostility towards dissenters at various points in this period. In the wake of the Priestley Riots, fears grew that the Bond Street Chapel and its members, like other non-conformist churches, could be a target for Church and King loyalists. In December 1792 it is recorded that: 'The Church met and spent the time in prayer in consequence of the tumultuous state of the town on account of the agitation of the public mind.'[61] Special prayers relating to the state of the nation were repeated in June 1793 and July 1794.[62] The congregation had good cause to show vigilance: Showell records that on 22 March 1813 the chapels in Bond Street, Belmont Row, and Ladywell Walk, and the Synagogue in Severn Street, were damaged by a 'riotous mob'.[63]

The minutes of both the Bond Street and Cannon Street chapels suggest that despite official statements of loyalty to the crown, many Baptists maintained scepticism towards the war with France. The Baptists were not pacifists but were hostile to enlistment. In 1795, Brother Lowe reported to the Bond Street meeting that Sam Haycock 'had been backsliding from God a long while … that he now had voluntarily enlisted for a soldier and persisted in going after cool reflection'. The Church agreed that he should be cut off. [64] There were similar instances at Cannon Street. In August 1794, H. Wilkes had to be persuaded not to sign up, in 1798

[60] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book*, 27 October 1800, p. 218; C. Gill, *History of Birmingham*, *Volume 1 Manor and Borough* (London: OUP, 1952), p. 128.
[61] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book,* 3 December 1792, p. 57.
[62] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book,* 12-13 May 1793 pp. 63-67; 30 June 1794, p. 86.
[63] T. Harman and W. Showell, *Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1885), pp. 281-2.
[64] *Bond Street Minute Book*, 23 March 1795, p. 102. This Sam Haycock was the father of George's brother-in-law, also Sam.

Brother Cashmore enlisted ‘totally insensible to the duties and spirit of religion’.[65] In 1813, the Cannon Street minutes report that the church was much affected ‘by the unchristian conduct of Bro. Thomas Fowler who has enlisted for a soldier by which he has abandoned his wife and children with an aged parent and dishonoured that holy religion which inspires us to love our enemies’.[66]

Another instance involved the minister Edward Edmonds himself. An account given by George later in life relates how he had met an exhausted soldier, who had fled the barracks after the first instalment of a heavy sentence of lashes. He had taken the soldier home, and Reverend Edmonds, though alarmed, had fed him and put him to bed.

> The next morning I dressed myself in the soldier's clothes, and danced before my father, as he lay in bed. He was angry and alarmed, particularly as, on looking out of the window, we saw a non-commissioned officer of the same regiment standing opposite, apparently watching the house. Nothing came of that; but the difficulty was, what to do with the man. At night, however, we dressed him in some of my clothes, and sent him off to Liverpool. He promised to write, but we never heard any more of him. His clothes were tied up in two bundles; my brother James took one, and I the other, and we walked with my father to Hockley Pool, where we loaded the bundles with bricks, and threw them into a deep part of the water.[67]

This incident, which probably happened between 1798 and 1802 and was vividly remembered by the young Edmonds, provided evidence of the atmosphere in the

[65] BA&C, BC 2/4/1/1/1, *Cannon Street Church Meeting Minutes 1793-1801,* 7 August 1794*,* 29 March 1798.
[66] BA&C, BC2/4/1/1/2, *Cannon Street Church Meeting Minutes 1802-31*, 17 April 1813.
[67] Edwards, ‘George Edmonds’.

town as well as his father's attitudes and values.[68] It was a risky business to help the young deserter; the Reverend Edmonds was prepared to put his fears aside and effectively break the law by giving the soldier shelter and helping him escape.

To be a member of the Bond Street Chapel meant being part of a close community with all the advantages and disadvantages that it could bring. It gave members from quite humble backgrounds the chance to serve and have a recognised position: for some this could be as Deacons, for others it might be overseeing the pews and vestry or teaching in Sunday classes. It provided support, both spiritual and material, in difficult times. On the other hand, it expected high standards of behaviour from its members. They were expected to stay within the law, but the sceptical attitude to the war with France suggests that doctrine and belief outweighed secular authority. They might be involved in petty squabbles but also in serious theological disputes. They would be expected to show concern for others less fortunate. These qualities would have impressed themselves on the young Edmonds, but the close-knit community might at times feel stultifying to a boy growing up.

After Edward Edmonds' death, Thomas Morgan continued as sole minister until 1846. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Bond Street Chapel, which had started its life as a breakaway group of enthusiasts, was part of the church establishment.[69] It continued to guard its fierce independence: in 1830, Thomas Morgan noted that 'the church has the inalienable right and privilege to manage its own affairs, choose its pastor and deacons, and is not responsible in the exercise of

[68] The exact year is not known but it is reasonable to assume that George was between ten and 14, young enough to amuse himself by trying on the soldier's clothes but tall enough for his own clothes to be lent in turn.
[69] Langley, *Birmingham Baptists*, p. 83; J. Briggs, 'Elite and proletariat in Nineteenth-Century Birmingham Nonconformity', pp. 79-83.

this right to any human authority but only to Lord Jesus Christ'.[70] The church survived until 1881 and the author of a short memoir noted that the Chapel had been distinguished not only for its Christian mission but its work for 'the advancement of civil and religious liberty, and the general promotion of social reforms.'[71]

The Bond Street Chapel provided educational opportunities for its members and George Edmonds participated in these. Baptist Sunday Schools expanded rapidly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, part of the wider Sunday School movement.[72] Baptist theologian Robert Hall saw education both as an important element in stabilising society and as a route for the poor to experience personal, moral and spiritual growth.[73] Like the Unitarians, Baptists wanted to avoid their own children being sent to Church of England services and to have greater control over the curriculum and a Sunday School was founded at the Cannon Street Church in 1795.[74] The Sunday School at Bond Street was first mentioned in the church *Minutes* in August 1803 when Francis Deakin proposed that a new building should be erected next to the Church.[75] In the absence of specific records for the Bond

[70] BA&C 64258, T. Morgan, *A Plain Statement of the Faith and Practice of the Baptist Church meeting in Bond St Birmingham* (Birmingham, nd, c.1830).
[71] BA&C 212477, *Bond St Baptist Church* (nd, 1880?); Langley, *Birmingham Baptists*, p .84. The building was occupied for a while by the People's Chapel, later became an engineering works and has now been abandoned. The redbrick remains can still be seen hidden under layers of ivy in Bond Street.
[72] J. Briggs, 'The Baptist contribution to the Sunday School movement in the nineteenth century,' in S. Orchard and J. Briggs, *The Sunday School Movement: Studies in the Growth and Decline of Sunday Schools* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), pp. 42-63.
[73] R. Hall, 'The Advantage of Knowledge to the lower classes, a sermon preached at Hervey Lane, Leicester for the benefit of the Sunday School, 1810', in O. Gregory (ed.), *The Works of R Hall* (6 Vols, London, 1866 edn), Vol. 2, pp. 149-164**.** See Chapter Two for Robert Hall.
[74] BA&C 130200, J. Hale, *Mount Zion Messenger* Vol. II, No.7, July 1895, 'Special Centenary of the Cannon Street Sunday School, An Historical Sketch 1795-1895', p 3. This was two years after the Old and New Meeting schools had been created. J. Money, *Experience and Identity*, pp. 134-136.
[75] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book*, 1 August 1803, p. 291.

Street Sunday School, the best approximation of its appearance and organisation comes from an account of the Cannon Street Sunday School.[76]

The Cannon Street School, initially just for boys but expanded to include a girls' class, had four grades: the top for those who could read the New Testament, the bottom for those who knew their alphabet. Evening schools for arithmetic took place on a weekday evening. [77] This suggests that the church took its responsibilities for general education seriously, alongside ensuring that children were prepared for church membership and baptism. Whether or not the Edmonds children were pupils in the Bond Street Sunday Schools, they would certainly have acted as teachers as soon as they were able. Sunday School teachers at the time worked voluntarily for long hours with little assistance or resources, an experience which would have prepared Edmonds for teaching at an elementary level.[78]

One incident in the life of the Sunday School might have involved George Edmonds. In July 1805, the Sunday School teachers met and agreed that there should be an annual election for their President, subject to approval by the Church. They recommended Brother Uriah Goodyear for the post, a change from the then President Francis Deakin. This suggests something of a democratic upheaval amongst the teachers. Given that George Edmonds was seventeen at the time, and probably one of the senior teachers, this might suggest an early engagement with democratic principles. The long-suffering Brother Deakin did not let matters rest. A few months later he complained about the unruly conduct of the boys.[79] Three decades later, when the church showed its appreciation of Francis Deakin's

[76] Hale, 'Special Centenary of the Cannon Street Sunday School'.
[77] Hale, 'Special Centenary of the Cannon Street Sunday School', p. 3.
[78] Hale, 'Special Centenary of the Cannon Street Sunday School', pp. 3-4.
[79] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book,* July 1804, pp. 320-322.

contribution to the work of the Sunday School, George Edmonds was one of the names that headed the testimonial.[80]

From 1828, the Bond Street Chapel provided continuing education in an initiative which reflects parallel attempts such as that of the Mechanics' Institution but was held under the auspices of the church.[81] A 'Society for Mental Improvement' was established in August 1828, open to teachers of the Sunday School, and young men who had graduated from it.[82] Fortnightly lectures were held on a wide variety of topics such as that on 'Calorie or Heat' from Mr Butler.[83] There was early enthusiasm for the Reverend Morgan's lectures using the globe, but after a few sessions, it was agreed that the students did not have enough basic understanding of geography.[84] This indicates that Bond Street's young people had a restricted education, reflecting the working-class status of most families, but that there was at the same time an interest in the wider world and in self-improvement. Many of the topics for discussion reflect interest in how scientific discoveries and observations related to religious beliefs. For example, Thomas Morgan delivered an early lecture on 'the magnitude of the works of creation'.[85] Fortnightly classes providing elementary education were also held, to which George Edmonds contributed, but it proved difficult to maintain numbers and Edmonds' own attendance became irregular. He was called away on business several times and resigned his post in February

[80] BA&C, 217362, *Address to Mr Francis Deakin, December 31st1833*.
[81] It might have begun earlier but this is the first record.
[82] BA&C 405835, *Minute Book for the Use of the Bond Street Society for Mental Improvement.*
[83] *Bond Street Society for Mental Improvement*, pp. 14-15. The lecture was 'illustrated by a variety of experiments made with apparatus kindly provided by himself'.
[84] *Bond Street Society for Mental Improvement*, pp. 25-26
[85] *Bond Street Society for Mental Improvement*, pp. 12-13. The following year Reverend Morgan lectured on 'The Diversity of Language and the Plurality of Tongues' which is discussed further in Chapter Eight.

1829.[86] Despite this setback, he was still looked to as a useful member to lead discussion when the opportunity arose.

Young women church members did not like the exclusionary founding rules of the Society and it was soon resolved 'that the young ladies who regularly attend the chapel be admitted to the Lectures of this Society by Tickets to be issued only by the Secretary and members of the committee'.[87] That there was a dispute about their attendance is known from comments in a magazine produced in 1866, the *Literary Palaestra*, which described itself as a magazine of the Bond Street Institute.[88] Four issues of this survive, and women were significant contributors. The women members had been, and possibly still were, engaged in an emancipatory campaign:

> Once upon a time there was a certain select company of those learned and clever gentlemen who thought to succeed by carrying on a Society for Mental Improvement. They would not have any ladies, oh no. Ladies could not understand such things; but … in a very short time they found out that there must be some lady members, or the Society would be a failure.[89]

This episode supports Catherine Hall's suggestion that the Evangelical churches were keen to ensure women's respectability and restricted sphere, but also shows

[86] *Bond Street Society for Mental Improvement,* p. 36. By this point, Edmonds had begun his work in the law. See Chapter Five.
[87] *Bond Street Society for Mental Improvement*, p. 16.
[88] BA&C, *The Literary Palaestra,* No. I -4 (1866). This seems to have been a short-lived chapel-based magazine. 'Palaestra' refers to the Greek wrestling and gymnastics yard, suggesting that this magazine was intended to be a discussion forum.
[89] *The Literary Palaestra,* No. I July 1866.

that Baptist women had their own views of what they should be permitted to do and were able to hold their ground against restrictions.[90]

Edmonds maintained his attachment to the church in adulthood and, at least as a young man, to its doctrine. When a group of local Baptists debated with the followers of the millenarian Joanna Southcott, Edmonds acted as moderator of the last discussion. He gave the followers of Southcott another opportunity to explain their faith, but kept to Baptist orthodoxy in his closing remarks, reading out an article from the *Evangelical Magazine* which rejected Southcott's teachings as blasphemous.[91]. In his later writings he professed greater latitude on the question of doctrine and the extent to which Edmonds' ideas were influenced by the Baptist tradition or reflected a broader radical and rational Christian outlook is discussed in later chapters.[92] His relations with other dissenting communities, with the Anglican hierarchy and Church 'party' are highlighted as they emerge. His campaign to reform Poor Law administration, his participation in the pamphlet war of 1817-19, the extent to which he became a target for the authorities, his involvement in the church rate campaign and his attitude to aspects of the Irish question are among the activities that in part reflect his upbringing and religious outlook.

Edmonds grew up in a community where family and chapel life were closely intertwined, not only because he was a minister's son but because of the nature of the Baptist gathered church. Individuals, their families, their working and social lives were bound up with the chapel and under the watchful eye of its Meeting. There would have been little privacy for the Edmonds children, with many duties expected

[90] C. Hall, The Sweet Delights of Home', in M. Perrot (ed.), *A History of Private Life Volume 4: from the Fires of Revolution to the Great War* (Cambridge, Belknap Press, 1990), pp. 62-64.
[91] CRL MS14, *Journals and Notebooks of Joseph Dixon, Diary of Joseph Dixon,* Vol. I, 30 April to 21 May 1813, pp. 137-180; *Evangelical Magazine*, Vol. 13, 1805.
[92] See Chapter Six.

of them, for instance, teaching in Sunday School and taking part in chapel visiting. Constant discussion and regular disputes concerning theological matters, church governance and church relations to the state would have provided an interested young person with an ample education both in those topics and in the skills of debate. An individual promoting a view within the chapel would have to know how to stand their ground but also maintain good relations with others. This would be particularly the case for George's father, the minister. This might have set the tone for George's later abilities to employ invective while at the same time building political alliances.

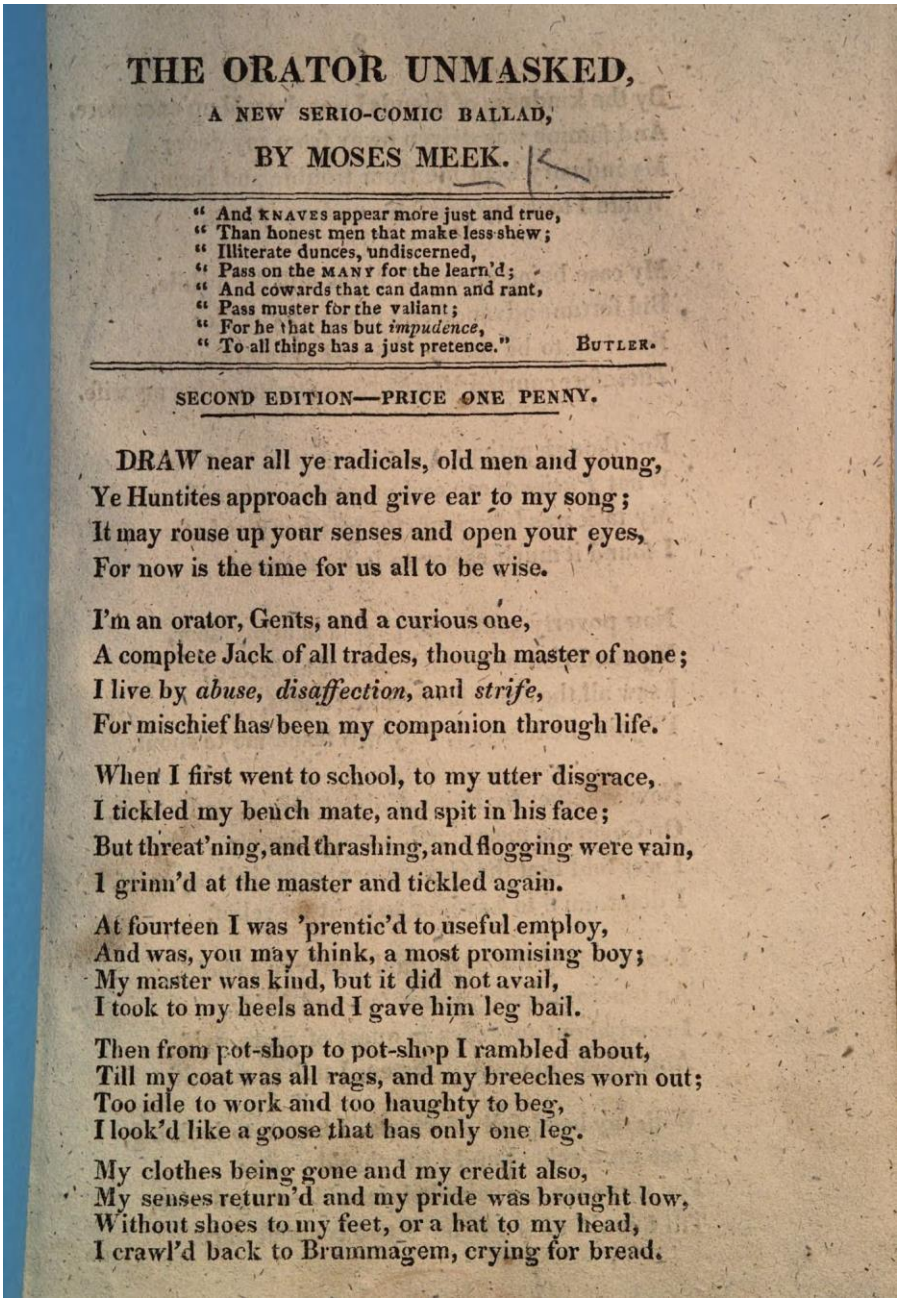
Wider horizons

George Edmonds turned eighteen in March 1806. He had spent his childhood and youth in and around the family home and Baptist chapel. He imbibed the democratic and independent spirit of the church as well as being subject to its watchfulness. This section examines the work and interests of Edmonds as a young adult, exploring how he moved into the wider world. The sources for this period are limited, the information is sometimes contradictory and a timeline is difficult to establish, but it is possible to trace the outline of events and to examine two significant episodes.

In his biographical sketch, Eliezer Edwards suggested that Edmonds 'was not apprenticed or articled to any business or profession' and devoted his early manhood to study.[93] The obituary published in the *Birmingham Journal* put this slightly differently, stating that it was 'his ill fortune to be brought up to no trade or profession'.[94] The *Midland Counties Express,* however, stated that Edmonds began his working life as a button burnisher working for Hammond and Turner of Snow Hill

[93] Edwards, 'George Edmonds'.
[94] *BJ*, 'Death of Mr George Edmonds', 4 July 1868

until he began to keep school ‘during the French Wars’.[95] The account contained in *The Orator Unmasked* paints a picture of a young man unable to settle to anything, dismissed from a trade, and being a trouble to his family (Figure 3.3).



THE ORATOR UNMASKED,

A NEW SERIO-COMIC BALLAD,

BY MOSES MEEK.

" And KNAVES appear more just and true,
" Than honest men that make less shew;
" Illiterate dunces, undiscerned,
" Pass on the MANY for the learn'd;
" And cowards that can damn and rant,
" Pass muster for the valiant;
" For he that has but *impudence*,
" To all things has a just pretence." BUTLER.

SECOND EDITION—PRICE ONE PENNY.

DRAW near all ye radicals, old men and young,
Ye Huntites approach and give ear to my song;
It may rouse up your senses and open your eyes,
For now is the time for us all to be wise.

I'm an orator, Gents, and a curious one,
A complete Jack of all trades, though master of none;
I live by *abuse*, *disaffection*, and *strife*,
For mischief has been my companion through life.

When I first went to school, to my utter disgrace,
I tickled my bench mate, and spit in his face;
But threat'ning, and thrashing, and flogging were vain,
I grinn'd at the master and tickled again.

At fourteen I was 'prentic'd to useful employ,
And was, you may think, a most promising boy;
My master was kind, but it did not avail,
I took to my heels and I gave him leg bail.

Then from pot-shop to pot-shop I rambled about,
Till my coat was all rags, and my breeches worn out;
Too idle to work and too haughty to beg,
I look'd like a goose that has only one leg.

My clothes being gone and my credit also,
My senses return'd and my pride was brought low,
Without shoes to my feet, or a hat to my head,
I crawl'd back to Brummagem, crying for bread.

<u>Figure 3.3.</u> First page of *The Orator Unmasked*

The Orator Unmasked: a new serio-comic ballad by Moses Meek (Birmingham, 1819)

Source: British Library.

[95] *Midland Counties Express* 4 July 1868, in BA&C, *Birmingham Scrapbook Vol. 1 Part Two A.*, p. 28.

It is possible that Edmonds spent some time in an artisan trade. Edward Edmonds had himself been a jeweller before he became a preacher, and other family members were involved in small-scale manufacturing.[96] Even if Edward Edmonds harboured ambitions for George to become a minister, time spent in a trade would not rule this out. [97] Given that money was, if not tight, then certainly spoken for in the Edmonds household, George might have taken a job at a local works and Hammond and Turner were significant button manufacturers located close to the Edmonds family home and church.[98] However, button-burnishing was a skilled trade and took some time to learn, so the story cannot be confirmed.[99] Edmonds is perhaps as likely to have gained experience of the manual trades helping one of his uncles. Certainly, his later interest in mechanical invention suggests a familiarity with machinery.

Whether or not he then had a period of idleness, as suggested in *The Orator Unmasked*, or of study, as suggested by Edwards, arrangements were made for him to become a schoolmaster in Blockley, Gloucestershire, possibly sent there to develop responsibility. The main source for this episode comes from the *Monthly Argus*, a satirical journal published in the early 1830s.[100] The *Monthly Argus* suggested that Edmonds had run up debt during his time as a schoolteacher in Blockley.[101] It acknowledged that the school was respectable and well-attended and that Edmonds had secured the position from Mr Smith, a Baptist minister and friend

[96] See above, and Appendix C.
[97] William Muckley, toymaker, had to go through several preaching attempts in 1798 and 1799 before the congregation supported him in his aim of joining the ministry. *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book,* pp. 181, 184, 210, 225.
[98] Hammond-Turner.Com, Buttonmakers, available at: http://hammond-turner.com/ (accessed 10 May 2020); *Bisset's Magnificent Directory,* 1808; *Wrightson's Triennial Directory,* 1815.
[99] *Morning Chronicle*, 21 October 1850.
[100] The dispute between Edmonds and the *Monthly Argus* is dealt with in Chapter Six; here the interest lies in what can be confirmed about Edmonds' activities in his early twenties.
[101] *Monthly Argus and Public Censor*, Volume 3, No.1 February 1831, p. 41. The accusation came in the form of a letter to the journal, probably penned by the editor, Joseph Allday. It referred to events that happened twenty years before, putting the date at around 1809-10.

of his father's. When Edmonds brought a libel case against the *Monthly Argus*, he confirmed that he had resided in Blockley, but denied that he had fallen into debt.[102] Other parts of the story ring true: there was a strong Baptist presence in Blockley, strengthened by silk-weavers moving to the area from Coventry, with a Meeting House opened in 1794.[103] A connection between the minister Elisha Smith, a pastor of some note, and Reverend Edmonds was highly probable, given that both had studied at the Baptist Bristol Academy about 1780 and were supported in their early preaching by local minister, Reverend James Butterworth.[104] It is likely that George was sent to keep school under the eye of Reverend Smith, teaching at a day school for children of the mill owners and silk weavers in the Baptist congregation.

Despite the respectability of this connection, Edmonds' time in Blockley was not without adventure and he became engaged to be married. In November 1809, the banns were read in St Peter's Church, Harborne, for the marriage of George Whitfield Edmonds and Sophia Figgures.[105] The latter was the daughter of Thomas and Hannah Figgures, née Peyton, of Blockley.[106] George was 21 at the time and Sophia was 18 years old. The Figgures and Peyton families were significant inhabitants of Blockley and related to Reverend Smith.[107] The marriage, however, did not take place. There is no note of explanation in the Record of Banns but the fact that Sophia was under age makes it likely that one or both families intervened. It

[102] *Monthly Argus*, Vol. 3, No. 6., July 1831, p. 232.
[103] H.E.M. Icely, revised and updated by Jeremy Bourne, *Blockley through Twelve Centuries: Analysis of a Cotswold Parish* (Blockley: Blockley Heritage Society, 1974/2013), pp. 107-114.
[104] Icely, *Blockley through Twelve Centuries*, p. 10; A. Langley, *Birmingham Baptists*, pp. 81-82.
[105] George Whitfield Edmonds and Sophia Figures, Record of Banns, 5-19 November 1809, Harborne St Peter, Library of Birmingham, *Birmingham, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937* DRO 61, 552. Harborne was then a village in Staffordshire a mile or so from Birmingham.
[106] Sophia Figgures, baptised 8 April 1791; Gloucestershire Archives, Gloucester, *Gloucestershire Parish Registers*; *P52 IN 1/1. Figgures is spelt in a variety of ways.*
[107] Icely, *Blockley through Twelve Centuries*, pp. 84-5, 113.

is impossible to tell if this was an intrigue or a tale of star-crossed lovers.[108] Whatever the full story of George's time in Blockley, or his associations with the Baptist families there, by the spring of 1811 he was living in Shrewsbury engaged on a new project.

This next episode, recorded in the first volume of the *Diaries and Notebook of Joseph Dixon,* provides evidence of Edmonds 'devoting his early manhood to study', as suggested by Edwards. The events described demonstrate Edmonds' commitment to self-improvement, to inventions, and may also give an early hint of the obsessive side of his character. Edmonds conceived an idea for a new design for a type-casting machine which found support from a fellow Baptist, a Mr Hawley in Shrewsbury. Even *The Orator Unmasked* suggests that this was at first a positive project: 'My Industry kept me from trouble and harm, While I took my portfolio under my arm.' Joseph Dixon, a close friend of Edmonds, was a young fellow Baptist with mechanical talent. In March 1811 he was invited to visit Shrewsbury to 'superintend the making of a curious machine for composing types, in the art of printing, invented by my friend G. W. Edmonds and patronised by Thomas Hawley esq'. Thomas Hawley was a local gentleman, of the manor of Cause in Shropshire.[109] From the diary it is clear that, unusually for someone from the landed gentry, Hawley was a Baptist adherent. This connection presumably lay behind the partnership.[110] Those involved were all excited by the project, but Dixon himself, while committed to it, and happy to follow his employer's instructions, was less sanguine. He wrote to his

[108] Sophia's father had made a recent second marriage which may have precipitated her desire to leave her own home. Edmonds eventually married a few years later in 1812. Sophia, perhaps with her chances diminished by the earlier affair, did eventually marry paper manufacturer John Robinson in June 1822. Thomas Peyton m. Sarah Blackhall, 12 September 1809. *Gloucestershire Anglican Parish Registers*; Reference Numbers: *P52 IN 1/9 Blockley 1800-1812.*

[109] CRL, MS 14.1, *Diary of Joseph Dixon* Vol.1, pp. 5-6, 92; Shropshire Archives 166/279, *Severne Collection*, Manor of Cause, Caus Castle and Farm. For example, payments by Thomas Hawley, 166/279/65 and 166/279/80.

[110] *Diary of Joseph Dixon* Vol.1, p. 96. 'The esq. is affected by a spinal injury, confined to a sofa and taken to the Baptist meeting in a sedan chair.'

parents and brother shortly after his arrival on 15 March: ‘It is a piece of mechanism of the most complex nature, which never will be in unison in every part. But if I am deceived it may make us all…’ (Figure. 3.4). If he was doubtful of the machine’s success, he was confident in his own abilities. He had the use of the tools of a local clock and watchmaker, declaring: ‘I give great satisfaction they tell me, there is not a man in Shrewsbury who could make what I have made.’[111]

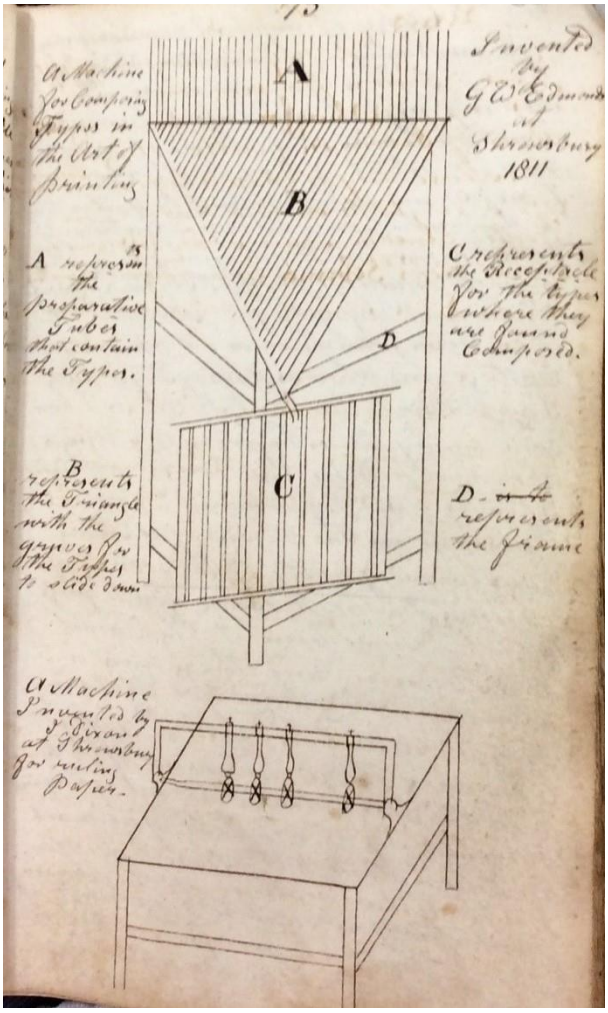


Figure 3.4. ‘A Machine for Composing Types in the Art of Printing’

Source: Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections, MS 14, Joseph Dixon’s Diary Vol. 1

[111] *Diary of Joseph Dixon Vol.1,* Letter to Parents and Brother, 14 March 1811, p. 92.

Dixon's doubts about the plans were borne out: although he had assembled a prototype by early April and did further work with Edmonds on a revised plan, it soon became apparent that the project had failed to bear fruit. Dixon eventually returned to Birmingham in early May.[112] Hawley gave Dixon £3, although some of this was given to Edmonds for expenses, presumably for his share of their digs. This was not much to show for eight weeks' work but there are no signs of any resentment in Dixon's diary.[113]

Dixon's diaries throw light on the concerns and activities of the young men, their involvement with the church and the social circle around it. They spent time with Reverend Palmer, an established Baptist minister, and were present for the re-opening of the Dog Lane Baptist Church. They were invited to the supper that followed, hosted by Mr Hawley, where there was 'a party of 22, 7 of whom were Baptist ministers'.[114] The diary paints a vivid picture of the affectionate friendship between the young men and of their wide interests. They greeted each other warmly when Dixon first arrived:

> I met by old friend (annotated GW Edmonds) in our usual way, we congratulated each other, and he loaded a thousand blessings on my head, we recapitulated our past adventures and the places we have met at. Oh how valuable is true friendship like that of Damon and Pythias, Jonathan and David, Ubert de St Claire and his sovereign Honery – may ours be as lasting and as true as theirs.[115]

[112] *Diary of Joseph Dixon Vol.1*, pp.18-29, 67-71.
[113] *Diary of Joseph Dixon Vol.1,* 9 May 1811, pp. 71-2
[114] *Diary of Joseph Dixon Vol.1,* 16 April 1811, p.2.,
[115] *Diary of Joseph Dixon Vol.1* 12 March 1811, p. 6. Hubert St Claire was a Norman English knight, Honery presumably one of the Henrys.

They had a room to study where they lodged, and apart from the time spent on the project, spent a great deal of time walking, especially in 'The Quarry' by the Severn, which had recently been turned into parkland. They discussed a wide variety of topics including aspects of mechanics, theology, and grammar, and showed an interest in all their surroundings from ancient buildings to men fishing in coracles. On one river trip, Edmonds fell in, but 'sustained no damage'. They attended the assizes and were allowed into the jail.[116] They visited a calico-weaving manufactory, and saw a demonstration of composing at a print works.[117] Edmonds' developing interest in grammar and language led them to visit G. Bagley, a linguist who had published eleven grammars.[118]

The young men were able to spend time in female company, for the most part under the eye of the church. They were invited to make a visit to Llangollen, but poor weather meant that they had to make do with a day tour from Oswestry, to see the 'Devil's Dyke'. In this outing they were accompanied by two young ladies, something that must have been considered respectable by their friends.[119] On their return, their landlady had given birth, and this perhaps explains why they had been sent away.

Dixon's diary paints a picture of a Baptist circle which was certainly male-dominated, but in which women were visible and active. In a letter to his wife, Dixon comments that Miss Harwood, who was present at a number of the gatherings, was sister to Mr Morgan of Cannon St, perhaps in an effort to assure Bernice that there was nothing untoward in the connection.[120] He takes the trouble to record that Mrs Cook, Mr Hawley's sister, waited at table in the evening after the opening of Dog Lane

[116] *Diary of Joseph Dixon Vol.1*, pp. 7-9, 15-16, 22, 31,
[117] *Diary of Joseph Dixon Vol.1,* p. 31.
[118] *Diary of Joseph Dixon Vol.1,* 1 May 1811, p. 54.
[119] *Diary of Joseph Dixon Vol.1,* 26-29 April 1811, pp. 44-54
[120] *Diary of Joseph Dixon Vol.1,* p. 96. Miss Harwood was a sister-in-law of Rev. Thomas Morgan.

Church.[121] It may be that this was worth recording because this was a female member of the gentry serving the Baptist ministers. Bernice's reply, while expressing anxiety and a desire to have him home, lets Joseph know that George's mother Sarah has been reassuring her about the purpose and progress of the project and the involvement of the young men in the Shrewsbury chapel.[122] The Baptist women made their own connections and were fully aware of the social and business movements of family and friends.

It is not known when Edmonds returned to Birmingham but later that year Dixon recorded being visited by him with a proposal to restart the project. This did not materialise.[123] It is difficult to tell whether the whole experience soured the friendship – the only other reference to Edmonds is in an account of a debate with the followers of Joanna Southcott, discussed above. Edmonds' partnership with Hawley was dissolved in 1813.[124] By that point, Edmonds was married and was probably under pressure to set up school and earn a regular income. Further testimony to Edmonds' continuing interest in mechanical design comes from Rosamund and Florence Hill's biography of Matthew Davenport Hill. Discussing their brother's friendship with Edmonds as a young man, they note: 'Of bold and original mind, Edmonds possessed great versatility, combined with extreme tenacity of purpose. At this time he was immersed in mechanical inventions…'[125] Edmonds certainly demonstrated

[121] *Diary of Joseph Dixon Vol.1*, 16 April 1811, p. 29.
[122] *Diary of Joseph Dixon Vol.1,* 'My wife's second letter to me', pp. 99-100.
[123] *Diary of Joseph Dixon Vol.1*, 11 November 1811, p. 86.
[124] *Morning Chronicle*, 3 May 1813; Dissolution of partnership T Hawley, J Hawley, J Kite and GW Edmonds, iron-plate makers.
[125] R. and F. Davenport Hill, *The Recorder of Birmingham: a Memoir of Matthew Davenport Hill with Selections from his Correspondence* (London: Macmillan 1878), p.11. Other aspects of the collaboration are discussed in Chapter Four.

inventiveness and tenacity in the project with Hawley, but perhaps over-reached himself and overall it was a failure.

Marriage, school and family

George Edmonds and Patience Hancock were married on 1 October 1812 at St Bartholomew's, Edgbaston.[126] Patience at 30 was six years older than George, although her age is recorded as nearer to his in the later censuses. Perhaps the families considered this a good, steadying match: it followed George's early romance, his involvement in an uncertain mechanical project and his participation in the 1812 campaign for the repeal of the Orders in Council – a political campaign which, however respectable in its outcome, had caught the eye of the authorities.[127] George's wife Patience was the daughter of William Hancock, a plater and mechanic of some renown.[128] Born in April 1782, Patience had ten siblings of whom at least four died in infancy. Her mother Mary died in 1798, leaving Patience – just shy of sixteen – and her older sister Harriet with family responsibilities. Harriet married John Rollason, a vellum binder, in 1810.[129] The Hancock children were baptised into the Church of England: this does not preclude the family being Baptists, but such an assumption cannot be corroborated.[130] George had married into a respectable family of artisans or small masters.

[126] *Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937***,** DRO 53, Archive Roll, M142, Edgbaston, St Bartholomew, Warwickshire, England. Marriage of George Edmonds and Patience Hancock, 1 October 1812.
[127] See Chapter Four.
[128] For William Hancock, see Appendix C.
[129] For Patience Hancock and siblings, see Appendix C.
[130] George and Patience's children appear in the Bond Street registers.

George and Patience's son Horace – almost certainly disabled from birth – was born in May 1815.[131] He died in 1840, aged 25 and there are no records of a marriage or any profession.[132] In 1821 Edmonds, referring to his children, stated that one, 'a little boy, was worse than helpless, being deprived of sight, of hearing, of speech and of intellect'.[133] A letter written by George at the time of Horace's death refers to a 'long-afflicted son'.[134] Whatever the full story, Horace's disability must have been a source of constant concern. He would have needed care throughout his life and, given that he would not be able to support himself, the family needed sufficient income to provide for him.

By 1815, Edmonds was keeping school in Birmingham, appearing as 'schoolmaster, Kenion Street' in *Wrightson's Triennial Directory* of that year. This suggests that the school was initially run from or close to the family home but by 1818, *Wrightson's* lists an 'Academy' run by G.W. Edmonds at Church Street.[135] In this period, the number of private day schools was rising: middle-class and artisan families sought education for their children, while for less well-off families, child care was a necessity. Schools were varied, from the 'common day schools' providing basic education at cheap rates through to 'academies' which could impart a good basic education, useful knowledge and some elements of the classics.[136] The fact that Edmonds listed his school as an 'Academy', and advertised it as a 'School for Young

[131] RG4/ 3113, Birmingham, Bond Street (Baptist), 1775-1837, birth of Horace Edmonds, 6 May 1815.
[132] England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837-1915, Birmingham, Warwickshire, Vol 16. P 205, 1840 Q4.
[133] *Birmingham Chronicle*, 7 June 1821. This was Edmonds' speech for mitigation of sentence, but even allowing for exaggeration, it suggests that Horace was profoundly disabled.
[134] *Birmingham Journal*, 31 October 1840. Horace's death is further discussed in Chapter Nine.
[135] *Wrightson's Triennial Directory*, 1815, 1818. In 1818, Edmonds wrote to the *Birmingham Inspector* from Hall Street which is close to Kenion Street.
[136] C. Birchenough, *A History of Elementary Education in England and Wales from 1800 to the Present Day* (London: W.B. Clive, 1920), pp. 3-4; C. Martin, *A Short History of English Schools* (Hove: Wayland, 1979), pp. 34-7.

Gentlemen', suggests that his school was of the latter type.[137] Better-off members of the Baptist congregations of Bond Street and Cannon Street might have been one source of clientele, along with other dissenting families.

Edmonds' time as a young man was spent in a variety of ways but it was an exaggeration on the part of Eliezer Edwards to state that he 'devoted his early manhood to study'. The account given in *The Orator Unmasked*, suggesting Edmonds had a misspent youth, also appears to be inaccurate. Edmonds may have spent time in a trade as a young man; he may also have caused his family some difficulties by not settling to an occupation and becoming involved in a failed romance. However, Joseph Dixon's diary does show two young men hard at work and studying together, even if their project did not bear fruit. Edmonds developed wide interests which included grammatical structures and mechanical invention. He had developed a thirst for knowledge and habits of study which were carried into later life and he was tenacious, perhaps to the point of obsession. By 1816, as a married man with a disabled child, he had substantial responsibilities which he fulfilled as a schoolmaster. He was also embarking on a radical political campaign and the way that this developed is explored in Chapter Four.

[137] *Birmingham Argus*, 16 January 1819.

Chapter Four

A RADICAL LEADER (1812-22)

This chapter focuses on Edmonds' emergence as a radical leader. Edmonds was a key figure among Birmingham reformers in this decade, chairing the Hampden Club and the mass meetings held on Newhall Hill, and campaigning for changes in Poor Law administration. He was tried for seditious conspiracy after the July 1819 Newhall Hill meeting and spent nine months in jail (See Timeline, Figure 4.1). There have been several studies covering this period in the history of radicalism in Birmingham which have considered its implications for an understanding of social relations in the town, the significance of Birmingham within national developments and the effect of the local context on the nature of radical thought and behaviour.[1] The concentration here on the activities and beliefs of George Edmonds allows an exploration of how a provincial radical leader developed, the radical programme and culture with which he interacted and how he dealt with contending responsibilities, opponents and allies, casting light on social relations within the town.

The popular radicalism that developed in this period, fuelled by distress, combined a critique of corruption and privilege with resentment at unfair taxes and repressive legislation. It blended a constitutional approach with mass action focused on the need for parliamentary reform. Different strands of thinking coexisted, from a

[1] R.B. Rose, 'The Origins of Working-Class Radicalism in Birmingham', *Australian Society for the Study of Labour History*, 1965, pp. 6-14; E. Hopkins, 'Birmingham during the Industrial Revolution: class conflict or class cooperation?', *Research in Social Movements,* 1993, pp. 119-137; D.W. McForan, *Birmingham Radicalism 1815-20* (Unpub. MA Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1982); C Behagg, *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1990); H. Smith, *Birmingham Radicalism 1817-1819* (Unpub. MPhil Dissertation, University of Oxford, 2010); S. Thomas, *The Development of Birmingham Radicalism 1815-1819 and the first Newhall Hill Meetings* (Unpub. MA Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2010).

constitutional critique of 'Old Corruption' to Paineite views.[2] The chapter explores where Edmonds' beliefs should be placed within this spectrum and to what extent Edmonds' constitutionalism brought him into conflict with more radical elements of the Birmingham movement, as suggested by Clive Behagg.[3] A related question is Edmonds' attitude to the relative absence of middle-class radicals at this point. D.W. McForan, who carried out the most detailed study of Birmingham radicalism in this period, showed that Edward Thompson's assumption that it remained under middle-class leadership was misplaced.[4] Behagg suggests that Edmonds was constantly trying to win over middle-class allies.[5] Harry Smith has shown that Edmonds, conscious of his own lack of gentlemanly status, sought the support of 'gentlemen' to strengthen the reform cause.[6] The chapter explores the extent of the absence of such sympathisers and asks whether this problem, rather than any programmatic principle, underlay Edmonds' tendency to pragmatism. The chapter discusses Edmonds' character and leadership capabilities, especially the tension between his caution and audacity, and assesses the fairness of contemporary judgements: jewellery manufacturer James Luckcock (1761-1835), for instance, considered that Edmonds possessed 'many of the qualities necessary for a popular leader', including dauntless confidence and 'a presence of mind ready for all exigencies', but believed that he should have shown more prudence and common sense.[7]

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[2] J. Belchem, *Popular Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1996), pp. 37-50; M. Roberts, *Political Movements in Urban England, 1832-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2009), p. 34; M. Chase, *1820: Disorder and Stability in the United Kingdom* (Manchester: MUP, 2013), pp. 5-7, 17-20.
[3] Behagg, *Politics and Production,* pp. 88-90.
[4] E. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (London: Pelican, 1968), p. 66; McForan, 'Birmingham Radicalism 1815-20', p.53.
[5] Behagg, *Politics and Production,* p. 91.
[6] H. Smith, *Propertied Society and Public Life: the Social History of Birmingham, 1780-1832* (Unpub. PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 2013), pp. 112-122.
[7] BA&C 205744, J. Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs in Humble Life* (Birmingham, 1825); H. Smith, 'Luckcock, James (1761–1835), educational and political reformer', *Oxford Dictionary of National*

A further aim is to throw light on the debate about the balance between social cohesion and conflict within the town. R.B. Rose considered that the emergence of artisan radicalism marked a breakdown of relations whereas Eric Hopkins considered that, even in this difficult period, there was greater cohesion in Birmingham than in other newly industrialised towns.[8] Through examining the challenge that Edmonds and fellow radicals made to the town's leadership and the reaction to it, the chapter assesses the extent of such a breakdown. Birmingham experienced no serious disorder in this period but there were five significant outdoor reform meetings between January 1817 and Sept 1819, many petitions, a vibrant print culture and propaganda war. The control and use of space by authorities and radicals provides a further perspective.[9]

The primary sources used in the chapter include Luckcock's *Sequel to Memoirs in Humble Life,* useful for giving the viewpoint of a sympathetic middle-class reformer who describes the difficulties the radicals faced and the shifts in middle-class opinion.[10] This account is enhanced by biographical material from the Hill family.[11] Eliezer Edwards' biography in *Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men* condenses the 1816-18 period but includes useful detail on the Newhall Hill meeting of July 1819 and the trial that followed. Both Luckcock's and Edwards' accounts, while sympathetic, are not uncritical, mentioning Edmonds'

Biography, 3 October 2013, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-104437 (accessed 7 June 2020).

[8] Rose, 'The Origins of Working-Class Radicalism in Birmingham,' pp. 6-14; Hopkins, 'Birmingham during the Industrial Revolution: class conflict or class cooperation?', pp. 119-137.

[9] K. Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789-1848* (Manchester: MUP, 2016), pp. 4-19.

[10] Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs in Humble Life*.

[11] R. and F. Davenport Hill, *The Recorder of Birmingham, A Memoir, with selections from his correspondence* (London: Macmillan, 1878); F. and C. Hill, *An Autobiography of Fifty Years in Times of Reform, edited with additions by his daughter Constance Hill* (London: Bentley, 1893).

tendency to fall out with friends as well as opponents.[12] The pro- and anti-reform pamphlets and newspapers from this period, including Edmonds' own publications, are partisan, with no quarter given, and offer a flavour of the sharpness of disputes[13] The *Board of Guardians' Minutes,* although circumspect about reporting disputes, give an insight into the Board's responsibilities.[14] Home Office papers reveal the close collaboration between magistrates and Home Office, while Treasury Solicitor's documents, annotated by the law officers, show how the case against the Newhall Hill defendants of July 1819 was prepared.[15] The site of the meetings at Newhall Hill and its relationship with the town has been explored by John Townley and David Steele and provides a further perspective on the significance of these meetings.[16]

The chapter first examines Edmonds' foray into campaigning activity in 1812, followed by three sections exploring radical activity between 1816 and 1820, considering the political programme and actions of the reformers, the wider culture of radicalism in Birmingham and Edmonds' challenge to the town's civic leadership. Finally, it analyses the national and local significance of the trial of Edmonds and his fellow defendants.

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[12] E. Edwards, 'George Edmonds', *Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men* (Birmingham, 1877).
[13] For example, *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder and Saturday Advertiser,* Nos. 1-8, 26 June- 7 August 1819*; Edmonds's Weekly Register,* Nos 1-19, 8 August 1819 to 6 January 1820; *The Saturday Register* Nos 1-7, 26 January- 15 April 1820; E. Burn, *A Word for my King, my Country and my God, being the substance of a discourse lately addressed to the congregation of St Mary's Birmingham* (Birmingham: Beilby and Knotts, 1819); CRL, Birmingham Pamphlets, 1819..
[14] BA&C, GP/B/2/1/2, *Birmingham Union Board of Guardian Minutes 1807-1826.*
[15] HO 33; HO 40; HO 41; HO 42; HO 43; HO 79; TS 11/695/2206, TS 25/2035.
[16] D. Steele, *Sites in Birmingham*, http://historyofpublicspace.uk/2020/05/27/heritageofprotest/ (accessed 12 June 2020); S. Thomas and J. Townley, *Commemorative Walk for The Newhall Hill Meeting of July 12th 1819* (12 July 2019).

Edmonds and radical activity 1816-1822		
1816	October	Birmingham Hampden Club officially formed
	December	Spa Field Riots, London
1817	Jan- July	W. Hawkes Smith publishes the *Birmingham Inspector*
	22 Jan	First Newhall Hill meeting
	11 Feb	Newhall Hill meeting; Edmonds writes *"A Vindication…"*
	March	Suspension of Habeas Corpus; Seditious Meetings Act
		March of the Blanketeers, Manchester
	April	Brougham presents Birmingham petition concerning distress to Parliament
	May	Oliver visits Birmingham; Derbyshire insurrection
	June	Birmingham radicals organise canal trip to Warwick County Election Meeting
1818	January	Habeas Corpus restored
	26 Feb	Newhall Hill meeting
	Sept	George Ragg publishes the *Birmingham Argus*
1819	Jan-Mar	Christ Church rate issue; *Letters to the Inhabitants*
	April	George Edmonds and James Luckcock elected to Board of Guardians
	June	Edmonds publishes *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder* and *Weekly Register*
	12 July	Newhall Hill Meeting elects Sir Charles Wolseley as 'Legislatorial Attorney'
	30 July	Birmingham Union Society formed
	August	Bills of Indictment presented against Edmonds & co.
	16 Aug	St Peter's Field meeting
	23 Sept	Newhall Hill meeting 23rd Sept protesting at Peterloo
	October	Pitt Club meeting; Anti-reform pamphlets; Loyal Address
	December	Six Acts
1820	January	Edmonds publishes *The Saturday's Register*
		Russell, Osborne and Ragg sentenced
	February	Cato Street
	Aug	Edmonds, Wooler, Maddocks, Lewis and Major Cartwright on trial
1821	June	Edmonds and others sentenced and jailed
1822	March	Edmonds released from Warwick Gaol
	22 July	Dinner for T.J. Wooler on his release

Figure 4.1 Edmonds and Radical Activity 1816-1822

Edmonds and the Orders in Council campaign of 1812

The first evidence of Edmonds' participation in public affairs and attraction to radical politics was in 1812. In that year, Birmingham was plunged into depression: manufacturers lost contracts, workers lost jobs or were put on short-time, the numbers in receipt of poor relief soared and there was food rioting in April 1812.[17] The town's High Bailiff for the year, the banker Thomas Attwood, and his business partner Richard Spooner (1783-1864), led a campaign against the Orders in Council of 1807 which were blamed by Birmingham manufacturers for exacerbating poor trade.[18] The campaign drew wide support: a 14,000-strong petition was presented to Parliament by the Whig MP, Henry Brougham (1778-1868).[19]

In June 1812, a group of mechanics and small-scale manufacturers formed a 'Committee of Artizans' to declare their support for Attwood and raise funds for a presentation.[20] Edmonds was one of those involved, possibly counted as an artisan because of his type-casting and plate-making partnership with Hawley.[21] Edmonds' uncle, buckle-maker Joseph Bower, was another member of the calling group. The

[17] J.A. Langford, *A Century of Birmingham Life, or a Chronicle of Local Events 1741-1841* Vol.2 (Birmingham: E.C. Osborne 1868), pp. 320-322; E. Hopkins, 'The Birmingham economy during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars 1793-1815', *Midland History,* No.23, 1998, pp. 105-120.
[18] The Orders in Council prevented trade with continental Europe and restricted neutral countries' trade, measures which impacted on Birmingham manufacturers.
[19] R. Dent, *Old and New Birmingham,* Vol. 2 (Wakefield: E .P. Publishing, 1973, [1878-1880]), p. 349; M. Lobban, 'Brougham, Henry Peter, first Baron Brougham and Vaux (1778-1868), Lord Chancellor', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-3581 (accessed 7 June 2020).
[20] BA&C, 62800, *A Report of the Proceedings of the Artizans of Birmingham at their Meeting Wednesday 17th June 1812*, (Birmingham, 1812).
[21] This partnership is described in the previous chapter. Edmonds may have been teaching by this point, but it might have been expected that members were involved in some sort of manual trade.

meeting and Committee were headed by the young Unitarian John Steer, then in the jewellery trade.[22]

Birmingham's nineteenth-century historians accorded importance to the Committee because it related to the first appearance of Thomas Attwood in public life and illustrated a common campaigning purpose between masters and men and therefore evidence of local social cohesion.[23] For Asa Briggs, it marked the origin of a political alliance between employers and employed, evidence of Birmingham's being less divided politically and socially than was Manchester.[24] However, the story of the Committee does not entirely bear out this narrative of cooperation. Whether because of the national war-time mood of hostility to any independent political activity from plebeian forces, or because of the Birmingham town authorities' fear of disturbance born of the 1791 Priestley Riots, the artisans were at first told that their meeting would be illegal and pub doors were shut to them. Matthew Davenport Hill (1792-1872), [25] who wrote the 'Introduction' to the subsequent pamphlet, noted: 'The question had assumed a new shape and consequence. The question was no longer – shall we meet? but – have we the right to do so?'[26] Henry Brougham was asked for support and the meeting was able to go ahead in the Shakespeare Tavern, New Street on 17 June 1812. One of the organisers, Joseph Wood, declared: 'The interests of the merchants, the manufacturers and the labouring mechanics are inseparable. They are mutual and reciprocal, they are as a connected chain, one link

[22] *A Report of the Proceedings of the Artizans;* C Steer, *Catherine Biddlecombe Steer's Memoir,* (1849), copyright Michael Maxwell Steer, Tisbury, Wilts.
[23] R. Dent, *Old and New Birmingham* Vol.2, p. 349; Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, pp. 324-326.
[24] A. Briggs, *The Age of Improvement, 1783-1867*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 2000), pp. 182-3.
[25] P. Bartrip, 'Hill, Matthew Davenport (1792–1872), penal reformer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-13286 (accessed 7 June 2020).
[26] *A Report of the Proceedings of the Artizans*, 'Preface'; Hills, *The Recorder of Birmingham,* p.10.

of which being broken, the whole is rendered useless.'[27] This declaration of mutual interests reflected the mood of co-operation but also acted as a reminder to the employers that dependence ran both ways.

The parade that followed demonstrated artisan independence at the same time as their gratitude. A large procession was organised to welcome Attwood and the deputation when they returned from their lobbying trip to London.[28] The Committee of Artizans was able to march three abreast with a flag reading 'Birmingham has done its duty' on one side and 'Grateful Artizans welcome the Deputies' on the other.[29] Of the twenty men elected to form a Committee to carry out the resolutions of the meeting, at least three, George Edmonds, John Hinks and William Jennings, appear in later radical activity.[30] The committee lasted into 1813, organising a meeting and dinner in October of that year to present Thomas Attwood with a £200 guinea silver cup. [31] An informal group of reformers continued to meet after 1813, until the Birmingham Hampden Club emerged publicly in 1816.[32]

Besides bringing Edmonds into contact with those who became his fellow radicals, this campaign also consolidated his connection with two young Unitarian liberal thinkers. In a diary kept for 1813-14, Matthew Davenport Hill noted that he, John Steer and Edmonds formed a debating society, where they had wide-ranging discussions. Hill remembered 'a long controversy with Edmonds about whether

[27] *A Report of the Proceedings of the Artizans,* p. 23.
[28] *A Report of the Proceedings of the Artizans*, pp. 33-39. Merchant Thomas Potts of Cannon Street Baptist Church was a member of the deputation.
[29] *A Report of the Proceedings of the Artizans,* pp. 33-39*;* R. Ward, *City-State and Nation: Birmingham's Political History 1830-1940* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2005).
[30] See Appendix D.
[31] Langford, *A Century of Birmingham Life,* Vol. 2, pp. 324-6; D. Moss, *Thomas Attwood: the Biography of a Radical* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), p.46 and p.313, n.55. The cup, designed by Samuel Lines, was treasured by Attwood as a reminder of the start of his relationship with the artisans. Moss considers that Spooner was more active on the issue.
[32] *Birmingham Inspector,* No. 8, 12 April 1817, p. 150.

science and learning are species of knowledge. I believe that we both at last agreed that they are.'[33] Hill and Steer were, like Edmonds, from a dissenting background but as members of the Unitarian New Meeting had rather better connections.

The Hill family, well-known for their progressive educational and reforming activities, were at the time running a school at Hill Top, Birmingham.[34] Political and scientific ideas were regularly discussed at home, and Thomas Wright Hill (1763-1851), a disciple of Joseph Priestley, inculcated liberal ideas amongst his offspring.[35] Edmonds' friendship with Matthew Hill lasted a lifetime. Hill valued Edmonds' companionship: whenever he was home from his law studies the two resumed their debating habit, designed to cultivate the art of public speaking.[36] Edmonds kept in close touch with the Hill family, consulting them before the first Newhall Hill meeting in January 1817.[37] Matthew Hill helped Edmonds seek out Sir Francis Burdett when he visited London the following month.[38] In turn, Edmonds persuaded Hill to join him in canvassing and speaking during the Coventry election in 1818.[39] In 1820, Hill made his name acting for Major Cartwright, when the Major and Edmonds were put on trial for seditious conspiracy.[40] Finally, the two friends spent many years together acting in the Quarter Sessions in Birmingham.[41]

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[33] Hills, *The Recorder of Birmingham,* p. 11.
[34] D. Wale, *The Development and Influence of Reformatory Institutions for Juvenile Criminals in Nineteenth-Century Education* (Unpub. PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2019), pp. 301-306; R. Watts, 'Joseph Priestley and his influence on Education in Birmingham', in M. Dick (ed.), *Joseph Priestley and Birmingham* (Studley: Brewin Books, 2005), p. 56.
[35] Hills, *The Recorder of Birmingham*, p. 8; T. Cooper and C. Creffield. 'Hill, Thomas Wright (1763-1851), schoolmaster', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-13313 (accessed 7 June 2020).
[36] Hills, *Recorder of Birmingham*, p. 25. A short-lived debating circle was formed with a few others. Smith, *Propertied Society and Public Life*, pp. 336-8.
[37] F. and C. Hill, *An Autobiography of Fifty Years in Times of Reform,* p. 44.
[38] Hills, *Recorder of Birmingham*, p. 26.
[39] Hills, *Recorder of Birmingham*, p. 37.
[40] Detailed below.
[41] See Chapter Nine.

Edmonds' acquaintance with John Steer (1793-1837)[42] brought his first connection with the print culture of the town. Steer and his brother Samuel produced a short-lived newspaper the *Midland Chronicle*, 1811-14, to which Matthew Hill contributed a number of liberal opinion pieces.[43] As a friend of the Hills and Steers and a collaborator of W. Hawkes Smith it is likely that Edmonds was involved in writing for the *Midland Chronicle*. Briggs refers to it as 'Whig-Radical', and controlled by J. Orton Smith and W. Hawkes Smith.[44] In the first issue of 1813, the editors defended the 'radical spirit' of their publication, rejecting as slander the idea that it was dangerous and framing their radicalism in both democratic and constitutional terms:

> If … a vigilant care over the commercial interest of the nation, a longing after the blessings of peace, a liberality on the score of religious belief and a desire for the reformation of the abuses which obscure our venerated Constitution be democratic – if such be even jacobinic – we earnestly hope that democracy and jacobinism may predominate; we however conceive and we are sure, that such a spirit deserves rather the name and merits the bright rewards of loyalty and patriotism.[45]

The authors trod a fine line, insisting that their reforming spirit was patriotic, but being daring in their use of the term 'jacobinic', potentially dangerous in a war-time atmosphere. It reflects the fact that older constitutional sentiments could combine with newer democratic ideas and language.[46] Despite being expressed in a

[42] Steer, *Catherine Biddlecombe Steer's Memoir* (1849).
[43] Hills, *The Recorder of Birmingham*, p. 8; BA&C 268744, *Midland Chronicle*, Vol. 1, 1811-1814. There is no sign of a Volume Two.
[44] A. Briggs, 'Press and Public in Early Nineteenth-Century Birmingham', in *Collected Essays of Asa Briggs, Vol. One* (Brighton: Harvester, 1985), pp. 106-137. The Smiths were also Unitarians.
[45] *Midland Chronicle*, 2 January 1813.
[46] M. Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution 1789-1815* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), pp. 26-39.

constitutional framework, the passage illustrates that within this Whig-Radical Unitarian circle, there was support for thorough-going democratic reform.

The *Midland Chronicle* reflected the emergence at a national level of a form of popular constitutionalism given the designation 'Radical', meaning a commitment to root and branch reform. A small number of Radical MPs became the main proponents of Parliamentary Reform in the Commons, backed by campaigners outside parliament, especially William Cobbett (1763–1835), who launched the Political Register in 1806.[47] A mass campaign saw Sir Francis Burdett elected to the Westminster seat in 1807.[48] When Thomas Northmore (1766-1851)[49] set up the respectable and rather exclusive Hampden Club in London in 1811, the veteran reformer Major John Cartwright (1740-1824)[50] sought to broaden its appeal, touring the provinces in 1812 and 1813 and calling for a taxpayers' franchise and annual parliaments.[51] There is no record of who welcomed him when, as part of his second tour, he made a 'transient visit' to Birmingham in 1813 but it is likely to have included Edmonds, as one of those associated with the Committee of Artizans.[52]

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[47] I. Dyck, 'Cobbett, William (1763–1835), political writer and farmer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-5734 (accessed 7 June 2020).

[48] Belchem, *Popular Radicalism,* pp. 16-30; H. Dickinson, *British Radicalism and the French Revolution 1789-1815* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), pp. 62-76; B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People: England 1783-2006* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), pp. 207-209; E. Vallance, *A Radical History of Britain* (London: Abacus, 2010), pp. 285-296.

[49] A. McConnell, 'Northmore, Thomas (bap. 1766, d. 1851), geologist and writer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20332 (accessed 7 June 2020).

[50] R. Cornish, 'Cartwright, John (1740–1824), political reformer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-4817 (accessed 7 June 2020).

[51] F. Cartwright, *Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright* Vol. 2 (London: Henry Colburn, 1826), pp. 38-52; J. Osborne, *John Cartwright* (Cambridge: CUP, 1972), pp. 100-102.

[52] *Midland Chronicle*, 6 February 1813.

The Committee of Artizans and its successor organisation gave radicals from plebeian backgrounds an experience of public campaigning and allowed them to claim a place in town life. Edmonds experienced political debate and discussion with fellow radicals, including several from middle-class Unitarian backgrounds, a wider circle than his Baptist background had allowed. He formed friendships and associations that lasted through various campaigns and personal vicissitudes.

Figure 4.2 'George Edmunds, son of Reverend Edward Edmunds'

The first portrait in a collection of five described as 'George Edmonds 1867-1868' in Birmingham Archives and Collections, *Birmingham Portraits.*

Edmonds and the politics of Birmingham radicalism 1816-20: programme and people

This section examines how Edmonds and fellow radicals applied the programme of popular radicalism and the degree to which Edmonds promoted the self-reliance of plebeian radical forces or sought middle-class support. It considers the extent to which Birmingham radicals related to national radical developments and looks at the significance of their actions in 1819.

Birmingham's radical movement was influenced by both national and local experiences. The end of the Napoleonic Wars and their aftermath saw considerable economic and social difficulties, exacerbated by the eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815. Opponents of the Liverpool Government saw it as defending privilege, favouring wealthy landowners with the Corn Laws and choosing repression when faced with demands for reform.[53] Home Secretary Sidmouth failed to lift war-time measures or reform the penal code. Habeas Corpus was suspended between 1817 and 1818, then the Six Acts were imposed at the end of 1819. Sidmouth saw a threat to order in every protest, and the demand for parliamentary reform as a 'specious pretext' for revolution and rebellion.[54] Popular anger which, in the east midland and northern counties, had focused on new machinery in the Luddite disturbances, shifted to the demand for parliamentary reform seen as necessary to improve social conditions. The Whigs were weak nationally and divided over the question of reform, so an extra-parliamentary movement developed. The programme of popular radicalism included representation for the new industrial towns, an extension of the

[53] This view of the Liverpool Government has been the subject of some reappraisal, given the social and economic challenges it faced, but the hostility to it is not disputed. N. Gash, *Lord Liverpool* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1984); W. Hay, *Lord Liverpool: A Political Life* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2018), pp. 171-199; Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People,* pp. 251-275.
[54] P. Ziegler, *Addington: a life of Henry Addington, First Viscount Sidmouth* (London: Collins, 1965), p. 349.

franchise, and an end to the system of patronage and corruption and to unfair taxation. Tactics centred on the 'mass platform', involving petitions, mass meetings, such as those held at Spa Fields in London in late 1816, the creation of local Hampden Clubs and a popular radical press, including Cobbett's *Political Register*.[55] A delegate meeting was called for the Crown and Anchor on 22 January 1817.[56]

Birmingham did not experience protests associated with changes in machinery, but its trade was curtailed in wartime and hopes of recovery were quickly dashed after the war.[57] Lost orders were not replaced, the numbers of unemployed were swelled by returning soldiers and the poor climate of 1816 brought food shortages.[58] Tensions were such that troops were stationed in the town during the summer of 1816.[59] Unemployed colliers passed through in July and numbers of itinerant poor gathered in the town.[60] Over 5,000 people claimed outdoor relief in 1817.[61]

[55] S. Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967 [1844]), p. 13-22; Belchem, *Popular Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain,* pp. 37-43; E. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State 1783-1870*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 191-2; B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People,* pp. 251-280; M. Chase, *1820: Disorder and Stability in the United Kingdom,* pp. 5-6; J. Uglow, *In These Times: Living in Britain through Napoleon's Wars 1793-1815* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014), pp. 624-641; E. Vallance, *A Radical History of Britain* (London: Abacus, 2010), pp. 310-312; R. Poole, *Peterloo: The English Uprising* (Oxford: OUP, 2019), pp. 16-22.
[56] *Morning Chronicle*, 23 January 1817; E. Royle and J. Walvin, *English Radicals and Reformers 1760-1848* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), p. 111. There is no record of a Birmingham delegate attending this meeting, possibly because the first Newhall Hill meeting was held at the same time.
[57] The only substantial threat against new machinery came from nail-makers who plotted an attack on the Britannia works, a new cut-nail factory, in 1816. R. B. Rose, 'Political and Administrative History: Political History to 1832', in *A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 7, the City of Birmingham*, ed. W B Stephens (London, 1964), pp. 270-297, *British History Online* http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol7/pp270-297, para 42 (accessed 29 October 2020).
[58] 1816 was the 'Year without a Summer', following the eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815.
[59] *Lichfield Mercury*, 17 November 1815; McForan, *Birmingham Radicalism,* p. 61.
[60] *ABG,* 8 July 1816.
[61] E. Hopkins, 'The Birmingham Economy during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1793-1815', p.116.

Table 4.3: Magistrates sitting in Birmingham 1815-1821

1815	1818	1821
Rev. Benjamin Spencer	Rev. B. Spencer	Rev. B. Spencer (Aston)
William Hicks (Kings Norton)		
W. Villers	W. Villers	W. Villers (Moseley)
George Simcox	George Simcox	George Simcox (Harborne)
Theodore Price	Theodore Price	Theodore Price (Harborne)
William Hamper	William Hamper	William Hamper (Deritend Ho.)
W. Withering	W. Withering (The Larches)	
W. Bedford	W. Bedford (Birches Green)	
	Isaac Spooner	Isaac Spooner (Witton)
	Rev. E. Outram	
		Rev. J.H. Spry (West Grove)
		Hyla Holden (Greenfield)
		Rev. I.T. Fenwick (Northfield)
		R. Spooner
		R. T. Lane Freer (Handsworth)

Source: *Wrightson's Birmingham Triennial Directory, 1815, 1818, 1821*

The magistrates were 'county magistrates who act for the town, some of whom attend at the Public Office every Monday and Thursday' (C. Pye, *A Description of Modern Birmingham in the summer of 1818,* London,1818).

Leadership of the town continued in the hands of the upper middle class, through the institutions of High and Low Bailiff, the Board of Guardians and the Street

Commissioners with power shared between dissenters and Anglicans.[62] Tory and Anglican domination was most pronounced in the case of the magistracy: the table (Figure 4.3) shows that of the magistrates who presided in Birmingham in this period, most were resident outside the town's boundaries and a third were Anglican clergymen by 1821. In this regard, Birmingham was in line with the rest of the country with 'Anglican males of property' responsible for dispensing law and order.[63] Like other newly expanded manufacturing towns, it continued without parliamentary representation, reliant on the two Warwickshire MPs, D.S. Dugdale and Sir Charles Mordaunt, and any lobbying it could muster for its own interests.[64]

The programme of popular, constitutional radicalism is clear in the programme of the Birmingham Hampden Club, which held its official inaugural meeting on 24 September 1816.[65] The resolutions included attacks on sinecures, pensions and rotten boroughs and called for increased representation, using the phrase: 'representation at least co-terminous with direct taxation', which suggests a compromise has been made between cautious reformers and those who wanted manhood suffrage. The constitutionalist and open approach was also expressed in the rules of the Hampden Club.[66] In a speech in 1866, Edmonds stated that the Club used membership cards and had about a thousand members: even allowing for the

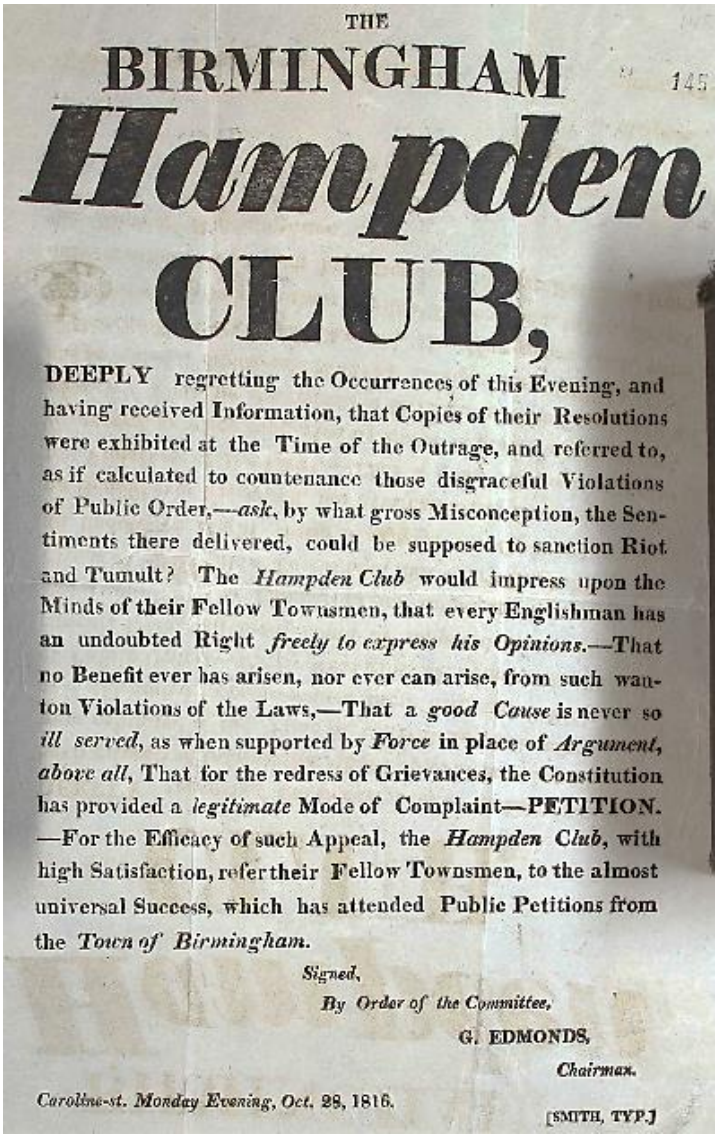
[62] As described in Chapter Two.
[63] Chase, *1820*, pp. 14, 20.
[64] R. Ward, *City-State and Nation,* pp. 18-19. The county franchise for 40-shilling freeholders meant that 400 Birmingham property owners were able to vote in Parliamentary elections in the years running up to the Great Reform Act.
[65] Later in life Edmonds stated that the Club had been formed in 1815: some sort of organisation existed between Major Cartwright's tour in 1813 and the Club's public appearance. *Birmingham Daily Gazette,* 28 August 1866.
[66] BA&C 89078(a), *Resolutions of the Birmingham Hampden Club, established 24th September 1816*.

exaggeration attached to remembered events, the Club had a substantial presence in the town.[67]

The leadership's desire to keep activity within lawful bounds soon faced a challenge when it had to respond to an outbreak of disorder. A crowd attacked the premises of the publisher of the *Commercial Herald*, Richard Jabet, who had posted an anti-reform handbill in his window. The magistrates called in the Yeomanry and Handsworth Cavalry and later the regular troops.[68] The Riot Act was read on 28 and 29 October 1816 and several people were arrested; one of these, William Askew, identified himself as a Hampden Club member while another, Elizabeth Martin, threw her arms wide and declared: 'Now we will let you know who shall triumph.'[69] The Hampden Club committee met on the evening of the first disturbance and hastily produced a disclaimer, signed by George Edmonds as Chairman, which argued that the Club would never sanction 'riot and tumult' (Figure 4.4).[70] This might have been a reproof to the Club's members, or have reflected the committee's awareness of the risks in being publicly identified with the trouble. Three days later, in answer to a complaint from the magistrates, Edmonds issued a second response, insisting that Hampden Club members were loyal and constitutional whereas those who defend 'places, pensions and sinecures' were the ones who were ill-disposed.[71] These, the first known publications in Edmonds' name, illustrate his twin-track approach to anti-establishment disturbances: to maintain the respectability and lawfulness of radical

[67] *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 28 August 1866. Edmonds described a Monday night meeting of three hundred at the time, HO 40/3/2 (41) 'Letter to a Tradesman of Bath', [January 1817]. The total population was about ninety thousand.
[68] HO 42/155 ff.490-495. The extent to which distress underlay the riot is confirmed by a letter from magistrate William Hamper to the Home Office, showing that there had been over 4,000 cases of outdoor relief paid at the end of October, HO 42/155 f.411.
[69] HO 42/155, ff. 249-255; *ABG*, 4 Nov 1816.
[70] BA&C 89078(c), *Statement of the Birmingham Hampden Club, Monday October 28th 1816*.
[71] BA&C 89078(b), *Statement issued by the Birmingham Hampden Club, November 1st 1816.*

organisation by condemning violence, while placing the blame firmly on the ruling elite. His disavowal of the disturbances did not prevent him coming under attack in the press.[72]



THE

BIRMINGHAM

Hampden CLUB,

145

DEEPLY regretting the Occurrences of this Evening, and having received Information, that Copies of their Resolutions were exhibited at the Time of the Outrage, and referred to, as if calculated to countenance those disgraceful Violations of Public Order,—*ask*, by what gross Misconception, the Sentiments there delivered, could be supposed to sanction Riot and Tumult? The *Hampden Club* would impress upon the Minds of their Fellow Towusmen, that every Englishman has an undoubted Right *freely to express his Opinions.*—That no Benefit ever has arisen, nor ever can arise, from such wanton Violations of the Laws,—That a *good Cause* is never so *ill served*, as when supported by *Force* in place of *Argument*, *above all*, That for the redress of Grievances, the Constitution has provided a *legitimate* Mode of Complaint—**PETITION.** —For the Efficacy of such Appeal, the *Hampden Club*, with high Satisfaction, refer their Fellow Townsmen, to the almost universal Success, which has attended Public Petitions from the *Town of Birmingham.*

Signed,

By Order of the Committee,

G. EDMONDS,

Chairman.

Caroline-st. Monday Evening, Oct. 28, 1816.

[SMITH, TYP.]

Figure 4.4 Birmingham Hampden Club Statement 28 October 1816

Source: National Archives, HO 40-9-145

[72] *Morning Chronicle*, 1 November 1816.

Edmonds at this point belonged to the constitutionalist – but popular constitutionalist – wing of the movement. His 'Letter to a Tradesman of Bath' described Hampden Clubs as 'the only thing to prevent revolution as they direct the people's efforts into a legal and constitutional path'.[73] In this letter he also outlined how the Birmingham Hampden Club wished to emulate the Manchester clubs in making meetings large, open and educational. He was glad that his correspondent saw the need to involve 'men' rather than 'gentlemen'.[74] This suggests that Edmonds' desire to win the support of middle-class supporters, about which he grew more insistent over the next few years, stemmed from the need to gain allies and protection for the cause rather than from any belief that 'gentlemen' were more worthy of attention. Whatever Edmonds' wishes, the social make-up of the Birmingham Hampden Club remained restricted. Rowland Hill (1795-1879) commented: 'It consists mostly of the working class although some of its members have a right to a rank higher.'[75] The Club's officers, and those who signed declarations, were a combination of better-off artisans, small masters, schoolteachers and shopkeepers.[76] This absence of middle-class reformers was seen as a problem both by Edmonds and the small group of such reformers who publicly supported the cause. Jewellery manufacturer James Luckcock whose reforming credentials went back to the Birmingham Society for Constitutional Information of 1792, never joined the Hampden Club but wrote petitions and acted as treasurer for several collections. He argued: 'If I could not

[73] HO 40/3/2 (41) 'Letter to a Tradesman of Bath', [January 1817].
[74] 'Letter to a Tradesman of Bath'.
[75] R. Hill and G.B. Hill, *The Life of Sir Rowland Hill and the History of the Penny Post by Sir Rowland Hill and his nephew George Birkbeck Hill* Vol. 1 (London: Thomas De La Rue, 1880), p.139; C. R. Perry, 'Hill, Sir Rowland (1795–1879), postal reformer and civil servant', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-13299 (accessed 7 October. 2020).
[76] Jennings, Hincks and Edmonds were members of the original Artisan Committee, Charles Whitworth was a schoolmaster, and Charles Maddocks a pawn broker. Four other convenors of the 1819 meeting were artisans or small masters. (Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, p. 422).

controul, I found that I could moderate their zeal, so as to guard them from violence.'[77] The Hill family was supportive but had to be cautious: Rowland Hill's explanation for why he could not join the Club casts some light on the political atmosphere of the day. The family's school depended on patronage and 'most of our friends in promoting (the school) are on the opposing side'.[78]

After its public launch, the Club concentrated on calling for a Town's Meeting to discuss political reform, part of a concerted effort by reformers nationally to organise more openly using the 'mass platform'. [79] Luckcock urged the Hampden Club to 'make application to the leading men' to get support for a reform meeting, and himself called on many individuals 'chiefly of the low party', but was disappointed with the response.[80] Nevertheless, sixty-three 'respectable citizens', including both Luckcock and Edwin Hill (1793-1876)[81] requested the High Bailiff, John Turner, to call a Town's Meeting to petition Parliament for reform. When the request was refused, the requisitionists called the meeting themselves, for 22 January 1817 on Newhall Hill.[82] Such a meeting was not unlawful but did involve a challenge to the town's established leadership: the right to call Town's Meetings was by convention vested in the High Bailiff. This must have been a nerve-wracking moment for Edmonds and his fellow Hampden Club members. Edmonds received a deputation

[77] Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs in Humble Life,* pp. 33-34.
[78] MS journal of Rowland Hill, Vol II, 1816, 143 Bruce Castle Museum, Tottenham, cited in Behagg, *Politics and Production*, p. 93. His brother Edwin, who was not working at the school, felt able to join the Club.
[79] HO 43/3/13, Letter from Hamper to Viscount Sidmouth, Birmingham, 14 December [1816].
[80] Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs*, p. 34. 'The Low Party' usually means dissenting Whigs and in this case was likely to have referred to friends amongst the Unitarian congregations.
[81] I. Hill, 'Hill, Edwin (1793–1876), civil servant and inventor of postal machinery', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 Sep. 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-13272 (accessed 7 June 2020).
[82] *Advertisement for a Town's Meeting*, 22 January 1817, reproduced in Langford, *A Century,* Vol. 2, pp. 413-4.

from some Unitarians asking him to abandon the plans, so fearful were they of a return of the popular violence of 1791.[83] According to Constance Hill, Edmonds visited the Hill family 'to talk matters over with father and our brothers'. They were convinced the meeting should go ahead.[84] Unitarian radical W. Hawkes Smith also continued to lend his support and spoke at the meeting.[85]

Edmonds chaired the meeting; the other speakers, Messrs Moore, Whitworth, Hincks and Jennings, were all reformers who appear in connection with the Hampden Club or later reform meetings.[86] The themes of the speeches and resolutions reflected the main preoccupations of the reform movement, combining bread-and-butter issues with political aims: opposition to high taxes which were used 'to fatten Placemen, Pensioners and Sinecurists', opposition to the Corn Laws and denunciation of the national debt. Reform of the Commons was 'the only sovereign cure for all our political diseases'. The resolutions and the Petition used the formulations 'general suffrage' rather than the more radical universal (male) suffrage**,** perhaps to win wider support, perhaps reflecting some Hampden Club members' beliefs. In a sign of there being a wing of the movement determined to promote the more radical platform, Whitworth successfully moved that 'annual parliaments' be substituted for 'frequent parliaments' in the Petition.[87] The town leadership took a pragmatic approach to this first Newhall Hill meeting, making no attempt to prevent it, although the magistrates kept in touch with Sidmouth and with the commanding officers of troops and yeomanry.[88] There was no visible presence of troops in the town and the *Report* of

[83] *BJ,* 15 August 1857.
[84] F. and C. Hill, *Frederick Hill, an Autobiography of Fifty Years in Times of Reform,* p. 44.
[85] BA&C 151005, *Report of the Proceedings of the Town's Meeting held on Newhall Hill on Wednesday January 22nd, 1817* (Birmingham, 1817).
[86] See Appendix D.
[87] *Report of the Proceedings, January 22nd 1817*.
[88] HO 41/2, pp. 193-7. In the end, troops were not brought into the town.

the meeting noted that the Constables conducted themselves peaceably 'and they deserve the thanks of the townsmen for so doing'. [89] Even the town's Tory press agreed that the meeting dispersed 'with the utmost tranquillity'.[90] However, national events ensured that this degree of toleration did not last.

The next episode exposed a sharp divide in the town and gained Edmonds his notoriety as a radical leader. On 28 January 1817, following an attack on the Prince Regent's coach at the opening of Parliament, when reform petitions were to be presented, the Birmingham Pitt Club called a meeting to declare support for the Prince Regent and to deplore the 'misuse' of petitions. It was this latter clause that offended the radicals and Edmonds and the Hampden Club organised to try to amend the resolution. A large crowd gathered outside the venue, the Shakespeare Tavern, on 11 February, and filled the room as soon as the doors were opened. The High Bailiff was unable to get the meeting underway, Edmonds took over and proposed adjourning to Newhall Hill.[91] The reassembled meeting passed resolutions which, while condemning the attack on the Regent, called on him to instigate an enquiry into the current distress and reaffirmed the right of petitioning.[92] The radicals had challenged the right of Birmingham's established leadership to decide on the town's policies and, in response, the latter held a meeting the following day in the Public Office behind closed doors and passed their original resolution.[93] In a 'Letter to the Inhabitants of Birmingham', Edmonds launched a scathing attack on this

[89] *Report of the Proceedings January 22nd 1817.*
[90] *Birmingham Commercial Herald*, 25 January 1817.
[91] Langford, *A Century,* Vol.2, pp. 415-6.
[92] BA&C 89099, *Resolutions and Address of the Birmingham Town's Meeting held on February Tuesday 11th 1817* (Birmingham, 1817).
[93] *Birmingham Commercial Herald*,15 February 1817. The *Herald* called the meeting 'the most respectable Assembly we have ever seen in this town'. Speakers included two Tory magistrates, the Reverend J.H. Spry and Isaac Spooner.

assembly, rounding on the gentlemen who had 'locked themselves up'.[94] He defended his own actions and the legitimacy of the meeting on Newhall Hill which was 'in every respect infinitely more respectable than the one held at the Jail'. The Hampden Club members had challenged the right of the old elite to speak for the whole town. 'The people may be ignorant, but they are not fools', Edmonds declared. They had begun to think 'and thought, though it moves silently, breaks the fetters of prejudice and ignorance'.[95]

If Edmonds had been assertive and pugnacious in his dealings over the February meetings, he was more circumspect once the government had suspended Habeas Corpus on 4 March, halted the Manchester March of the Blanketeers and passed the Seditious Meetings Act of 31 March 1817.[96] He found a means of maintaining a public campaign with a new petition launched on 3 April 1817, which, he explained, was lawful even if the Restrictive Acts prevented another public meeting. It avoided 'disputed questions' and concentrated on the urgent need for amelioration of distress.[97] He persuaded Thomas Attwood to help draw up this 'Distressed Mechanics Petition', which was presented to the Commons by Brougham on 29 April.[98] That he was able to do this suggests that the two were on good terms, despite Attwood's having declined to join the Hampden Club.[99] However, there were signs of a difference over tactics amongst the radicals. Some Birmingham Hampden

[94] The meeting took place in the jail section of the Public Office.
[95] BA&C 61887, *Letter to the Inhabitants of Birmingham being a vindication of the conduct of the writer at the late Meeting at the Shakespeare*.
[96] Dent, *The Making of Birmingham*, (Birmingham: Allday, 1894), p. 350; H. Martineau, *History of the Peace: Being a History of England from 1815 to 1854 Volume 2 1815-1826* [1864] (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005) pp. 140-141; Thompson, *The Making*, pp. 700-701.
[97] BA&C 89074, *To the Inhabitants of Birmingham from George Edmonds, Chairman of the Town's Meeting* (Birmingham 1817); Dent, *The Making of Birmingham,* pp. 350-1.
[98] Dent, *The Making of Birmingham,* p. 351; Moss, *Thomas Attwood,* pp. 52-53; C. Wakefield, *Life of Thomas Attwood* (London: Harrison, 1885), p. 61.
[99] Moss, *Thomas Attwood,* pp. 53, 78.

Club members were caught up in the web of clandestine activity and espionage which marked the spring and summer of 1817. The Home Office spy Oliver visited Birmingham on 25 April and 24 May.[100] Oliver's reports suggest that he met Charles Whitworth, and four others. Whitworth was elected delegate to the Wakefield meeting of 5 May.[101] On 27 May, magistrate Isaac Spooner wrote to Sidmouth stating: 'Hincks is now the leader of the Hampden Club. Edmonds has declined to act with them though he is friendly to the cause.' There was talk of a planned attack on the barracks but Spooner's informant had few details because a small group had started meeting privately, fearing the presence of spies.[102] Nevertheless, by 11 June, at the time of the Pentrich Rising in Derbyshire, magistrate William Hamper was able to report that tranquillity prevailed.[103]

As with much else about the Oliver affair, it is difficult to deduce the real extent of radical involvement in the plans for a general rising. In July, Edmonds stated in the *Birmingham Inspector* that Oliver's attempts to mislead contacts in Birmingham had been in vain.[104] It is tempting to paint Edmonds as the law-abiding constitutionalist and Whitworth as a hot-head but Behagg's suggestion that 'Edmonds was clearly in conflict with other elements in the radical movement at this time' might be reading back from later evidence of Edmonds' pragmatic approach. [105] We do not have Hampden Club minutes, still less any evidence of what was said in private meetings.

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[100] Thompson, *The Making,* p 716. All the sources for this period are, as Thompson notes, very partisan. Reformers and Whigs tend to blame everything on Oliver; the authorities see conspiracies everywhere. The truth, he suggests, is more complex.
[101] H.O. 41/3 f. 62 Hobhouse to Hamper 27 May 1817; HO 40/9/ ff. 240-241 Transcript of extract from Oliver's diary available at https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/protest-and-democracy-1816-to-1818/oliver-spy/
[102] H.O. 40/6 (1) Spooner to Sidmouth, 27 May 1817.
[103] H.O. 41/3 ff. 77 and 110, Hamper to Hobhouse.
[104] *Birmingham Inspector*, No. 14, 5 July 1817, p. 296.
[105] Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 88-90.

Over the following two years for every sign of Edmonds' caution, there is another of his campaigning zeal.

This was shown in early 1818 when, after a period when radical activity was at a low ebb, Edmonds and others organised a Newhall Hill meeting on 26 February 1818.[106] This included defiant speeches but also revealed a search for allies. The Suspension Act had been lifted but former detainees were prevented from suing for wrongful imprisonment. The Birmingham meeting welcomed recently-released Manchester radicals Bagguley and Johnson and opposed the Indemnity Act.[107] Edmonds kept channels open with the Chief Constable, Mr Payne and, in a sign that reformers recognised a difference in the behaviour of Manchester and Birmingham authorities, speakers from each town contrasted the behaviour of the Chief Constables. 'Oliver came to Birmingham but thank God he was unsuccessful, he found no coadjutors here in the Police,' said Edmonds, 'he did not find the bloody Nadin of Manchester in the person of Mr Payne.' Johnson declared: 'In Birmingham you have an honest police, in Manchester a villainous one.' Edmonds stressed that he was 'anxious to get the business of reform into the hands of persons of more prosperity and consequence than himself'.[108] The attempt to involve middle-class sympathisers met with some success, perhaps because this was a respectable cause in pursuit of civil liberties, and a committee was set up to pursue the campaign against the Indemnity Act. The list included Baptist merchant Thomas Potts, Whig-leaning merchant Joshua Scholefield (1774-1844) and several members of the radical-sympathising

[106] W. Hawkes Smith had closed the *Birmingham Inspector* in the summer of 1817, complaining of lack of support, *Birmingham Inspector*, No. 16, 23 August 1817, pp. 329-334.
[107] BA&C 64255, *Report of the Town's Meeting held on Newhall Hill, Thursday February 26th 1818* (Birmingham, 1818); HO 33/2/20, Letter from Birmingham Post Office to Francis Freeling, General Post office Secretary, 19 February 1818; Martineau, *History of the Peace*, Vol 2, pp. 214-222. The Indemnity Act made it impossible for any of the released detainees to sue for wrongful imprisonment.
[108] *Report of the Town's Meeting, February 26th 1818.*

Unitarian middle class, including Luckcock, J. Phipson and Thomas Clark junior. Clark, Luckcock and the Hills made up a group of more consistent supporters of radical reform from the Unitarian middle class.[109] Not all Whig sympathisers joined in, however; for example, Thomas Osler, a glass manufacturer, declined to participate.[110]

Despite these instances of wider support, by the spring of 1819 radicals saw few signs of serious opposition from Whig politicians or reform from the Liverpool Government. At both a national and local level, the radical movement sought new tactics, one of which, advocated by T.J. Wooler's *Black Dwarf*, was to elect representatives from the un-enfranchised towns from mass meetings. The genesis of this idea related to a constitutional proposal put forward by Major Cartwright in his *A Bill of Rights and Liberties*, 1817, for annual elections as well as relating to the longstanding notion of a National Convention, but it also had a symbolic character.[111] Edmonds took up the idea with enthusiasm and the events that followed raise the question of whether he and the Birmingham radicals were foolhardy and whether, contrary to established myth, they were as militant as those of Manchester.

The Birmingham meeting was called for Monday 12 July.[112] Sir Charles Wolseley (1769-1846), chosen to be the Birmingham representative because of his longstanding

[109] BA&C, MS 1114/4, MS 1114/8, Autobiographical Notebooks and Memoirs of Thomas Clark Junior; Smith, *Propertied Society and Public Life,* pp. 321-327

[110] Edmonds saved a letter from Osler and quoted it when attacking the Whigs at the launch of the BPU in January 1830, *ABG*, 1 February 1830. See Chapter Six.

[111] *Black Dwarf*, 30 June 1819; J. Belchem, *Orator Hunt*: *Henry Hunt and English Working-Class Radicalism* (London: Breviary, 2012 [1985]) pp. 77-78; Poole, *Peterloo*, pp. 223-4; Vallance, *A Radical History of Britain*, p.326.

[112] The promoters were George Edmonds, Proprietor of the *Weekly Recorder and Saturday Advertiser*, Charles Maddocks, Pawnbroker, Lionel St, Timothy Massey, Carpenter, Canal St, Wm Harcourt, Brassfounder, Loveday St, Robert Harcourt, Brassfounder, Staniforth St, George Cox, measuring tape maker, Martin St, Joseph Allcock, butcher, High St (Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, p. 22). See also Appendix D.

record as a Radical and his social status, was unable to attend the meeting.[113] Major Cartwright did arrive and his biography suggests it was he who persuaded the Birmingham organisers to substitute the words 'legislatorial attorney' for 'member', which was thought to be less provocative. This would be 'sending a petition in the form of a man'. The exact nature of the tactic was discussed up to the eve of the Newhall Hill meeting, suggesting that the organisers were aware of the potential legal pitfalls.[114] Edmonds agitated for the new approach in his newly launched paper, the *Weekly Recorder*. Petitioning, he suggested, was no longer enough. However, 'we are not going to recommend (our readers) to change the parchment for the musket'.[115] Two days before the meeting he urged his fellow townsmen to 'beware of disorder, keep the peace, obey the laws, but be firm; assert your natural and constitutional rights'.[116] He continued this theme in the meeting itself:

> We have been long talking about the right of the people to representation, we are now about to exercise that right. This is doing something, and something, which, from its novelty as well as its justice will excite a very general sensation throughout the country.[117]

This hints at another possible motive: that Edmonds and others were keen to 'put Birmingham on the map'. Charles Maddocks, T.J. Wooler and Mr Lewis, a Coventry radical, spoke at the 20,000-strong meeting, Lewis declaring the movement united

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[113] Wolseley's mother had just died. He had already spoken at Stockport on 28 June and was arrested in connection with that event. He was cautious, however, about the invitation to be Legislatorial Attorney, and this saved him from further prosecution. Poole, *Peterloo*, pp. 223-224.
[114] F. Cartwright, *Life and Correspondence,* pp. 164-166.
[115] *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder and Saturday Advertiser,* No. 1*,* 26 June 1819.
[116] *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder,* No.2, 10 July 1819.
[117] *A Correct Report of the Proceedings of a Meeting held at Newhall Hill, Birmingham on Monday, July 12th 1819, for the purpose of obtaining the Representation of the People of Birmingham* (Birmingham 1819); this is collected in the Treasury Solicitor's papers, TS/25/2035.

around annual parliaments, universal suffrage and election by ballot. Edmonds too used the formula 'the extension of suffrage to all and vote by ballot', a more radical expression than his previous calls for a 'general suffrage'. The resolution declared that Sir Charles Wolseley was elected Legislatorial Attorney and Representative of the Inhabitants of Birmingham and 'instructed to claim, on their behalf, by letter to the Rt. Hon. Speaker of the House of Commons, admission into that House as a member thereof'.[118]

These events had a considerable impact both locally and nationally. Ahead of the meeting, neither magistrates nor Home Office had seemed alarmed.[119] Edmonds noted that 'the magistrates shewed their wisdom by sending the military out of town during the proceedings'.[120] However, according to Harriet Martineau, the election of a Legislatorial Attorney 'seems to have startled the government more than anything that had yet taken place'.[121] Within a few days, the Home Office and Birmingham magistrates moved against the organisers. On 17 July, after consulting the Attorney and Solicitor General, Sidmouth wrote to Isaac Spooner asking him to collect all possible evidence.[122] Spooner carried out these instructions assiduously, sending copies of handbills and *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder* along with the depositions of various witnesses.[123] Edmonds, Cartwright, Maddocks, Wooler and Lewis were indicted at Warwick on 9 August with 'designing to raise disaffection and discontent in the minds of his majesty's subjects' and conspiracy 'to elect, nominate and appoint a

[118] Ibid.
[119] HO 41/4 p. 325, Hobhouse to Spooner, 6 July 1819, and p. 331, 8 July 1819.
[120] *Edmonds Weekly Recorder,* No. 4, 17 July 1819*,* p. 29. The Warwick yeomanry were being kept 'fully accoutered' at Hockley House, just outside the boundary.
[121] Martineau, *History of the Peace,* pp. 253-4.
[122] HO 41/4, p. 351, Hobhouse to Attorney and Solicitor General, 15 July 1819; p. 361, Hobhouse to Spooner, 17 July 1819.
[123] Material held in TS/25/2035.

person to be representative of the inhabitants of Birmingham'.[124] In the wake of the Birmingham meeting, a Proclamation was issued by the Prince Regent, warning against any repetition.[125] The planned Manchester meeting was put back and its terms changed to simply 'considering the propriety' of electing a representative.[126] This caution was not enough to prevent the Manchester magistrates' fatal decision to send in the yeomanry on 16 August. Whatever the intentions of Edmonds, Wooler and others, their plan for a peaceful but determined ratcheting up of the campaign for reform had failed. It could be that the whole idea was foolhardy and contributed to the repression that followed. More likely is that the combination of mass agitation, distress and governmental refusal to countenance reform was inevitably leading to confrontation. As Edward Thompson put it: 'The policy of open constitutionalism was proving more revolutionary in its implications than the policy of conspiracy and insurrection.'[127]

The first response of Birmingham's radicals to the summer's events was to launch the Birmingham Union Society, which aimed 'by temperate and constitutional means to obtain our rights as freemen in society'. Charles Whitworth took over the Chair.[128] Behagg suggests that Edmonds' decision to stand aside from the Union Society marked a continuation of differences with Whitworth but this view is difficult to sustain; it is just as likely, as D.W. McForan suggests, that this was a sensible measure given Edmonds' indictment.[129] The Society continued the tradition of mainstream constitutional radicalism shown in its *Declaration* of 31 August which

[124] F. Cartwright, *Life and Correspondence,* p. 166.
[125] *Birmingham Commercial Herald*,24 August 1819.
[126] Poole, *Peterloo* p. 253.
[127] Thompson, *The Making,* p. 749**;** Poole, *Peterloo*, pp. 377-381.
[128] *Address of the Committee of the Birmingham Union Society*, 18 August 1819, in BA&C, Birmingham Scrapbook Vol 3, Part 1 (1819b), p.163.
[129] Behagg, *Politics and Production* p. 90; McForan, *Birmingham Radicalism*, pp. 157-8.

deplored ‘the violations and corruptions that have been forced by a cruel aristocracy into the glorious Constitution’. Its educational activity, which included discussion of a variety of radical texts, from Rousseau to Paine, reflected the eclecticism of popular radicalism.[130] None of this suggests that the Union Society occupied a more radical political position than did Edmonds, although events over the following months do reveal some tensions.

Edmonds himself was defiant in print. The radicals’ opponents, he wrote, had shown a silent contempt for petitions but failed to goad them into violence. Expressing, perhaps, his own frustration at the refusal of those with more status to step forward, he stated that the reformers had called up their own leaders and had no need to lean on others, ‘when rank and connections render their immediate and apparent interests different from ours’.[131] He did show some wariness about holding a meeting to protest at the Manchester events: only when he heard that the High Bailiff was considering a request from Reverend Spry (1777-1854) for a meeting to thank the Manchester Yeomanry, did he go ahead and call a Newhall Hill meeting for 23 September 1819.[132] However, this was a fine judgement to make. Edmonds had responsibilities not only to his own family but to all those who might attend. Later he was to recall his fears: ‘I remember when, after the atrocious Manchester massacre, I put my name to a placard, to call a meeting on Newhall-hill…and was then menaced with imprisonment, with destruction from the military.’[133] The meeting went off peacefully although one

[130] BA&C 49726, *Declaration, Rules and Resolutions of the Birmingham Union Society* (Birmingham,1819). McForan, *Birmingham Radicalism*, pp. 157-9, discusses the educational programme, the national links maintained by the Birmingham Union Society and a proselytising drive into the Black Country,
[131] *Edmonds’s Weekly Recorder*, 14 August 1819, p. 57**.**
[132] *Edmonds’s Weekly Register*, 11 and 18 September 1819; McForan, *Birmingham Radicalism*, pp.160-161. For Reverend J.H. Spry of Christchurch, see Appendix C.
[133] *BJ,* 6 February 1836; see also HO/42/195, pt. 1, p.100, Spooner to Sidmouth.

report suggested that several thousand participants were armed, in case of an attack.[134] A mixture of propaganda and threats helped ensure a lower turn-out, with some employers pressurising their workforce and the magistrates requesting people to stay away.[135] (Figure 4.5). In December Edmonds again showed caution, disagreeing with others over a call for a Town's Meeting, and insisting that the Society withdrew its support.[136]

Figure 4.5 Magistrates' Notice, 23 September 1819

Letter from Birmingham Post Office to Francis Feeling, General Post Office Secretary, enclosure in HO 33/2/33

[134] Rose, 'Political History', *VCH Warwickshire, Vol. Seven*, p. 289. This is quite plausible in the aftermath of Peterloo.

[135] HO 33/2/33, Letter from Birmingham Post Office to Francis Feeling, General Post Office Secretary, enclosing a John Nott pamphlet criticising the Manchester meeting and a printed handbill; Langford*, A Century*, Vol.2, p. 425.

[136] *Edmonds's Weekly Register,* No. 17, 18 December 1819; This was probably part of a national radical plan for simultaneous meetings. In the event the plan was abandoned at a national level, but Charles Whitworth was jailed for a handbill deemed to be inciting rebellion, Behagg, *Politics and Production,* p. 90; Chase, *1820*, p. 54.

The apparent failure of constitutional means, and fears of the military, increased support for clandestine organisation. There were reports of Union Society members arming themselves and of arms being manufactured for radicals elsewhere. The Home Office placed informers inside the Society.[137] Edmonds publicly attacked the idea of radicals arming in secret. This was the first of several occasions when he tried to explain his views on the right to bear arms.[138] Like many other radicals, he supported this constitutional right but argued that doing this clandestinely would 'make an act illegal which circumstances may call upon them to perform in defence of the laws'.[139] Radicals nationally and locally grappled with this problem over the following year, fearing attacks but knowing that anyone arming openly courted arrest. George's brother Edward Amos Edmonds was among those taking a more intransigent position. Edward acted as a delegate to a meeting in London called to discuss tactics in the wake of the Peterloo events. Along with other provincial delegates, he supported the idea of building up the constitutional 'Union Societies' but agreed that radicals should be armed.[140]

Throughout these events Edmonds remained a proponent of popular, constitutional radicalism. When he advanced the restricted aim of household rather than manhood suffrage, this was probably because of his desire to win over middle-class support. He also showed caution on occasions – for instance, over the Oliver affair. However, his audacity and confidence were revealed on several occasions in early 1817 and

[137] McForan, *Birmingham Radicalism*, p.180; Chase, *1820*, p. 46. 'In defence of the laws', implies in defence of the constitution, including an unlawful attack on citizenry.
[138] The question was raised again in the crises of Autumn 1831, May 1832 and in a dispute with Feargus O'Connor in 1839, see Chapters Six and Seven.
[139] *Edmonds Weekly Register*, No.11, 6 November 1819, pp. 86-89.
[140] I. Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and his Times* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1979), p. 118. Edward stayed on in London, becoming involved with the radical James Watson for a period. See Appendix B.

July 1819. He succeeded in keeping some middle-class support, from a minority of Unitarian radicals, throughout the period, but for the most part it was he and other plebeian radicals who formed the leadership of the movement.

Edmonds and the culture of Birmingham radicalism: print, space, and symbols

If the nature of radicalism in Birmingham in this period was partly determined by the established programme of popular radicalism it was also affected by its cultural framework. Both written and spoken word figured in the propaganda battle between radicals and loyalists alongside theatrical demonstrations of political adherence. The occupation and use of space provided another aspect to the cultural warfare. This section explores Edmonds' engagement with these cultural expressions and considers the extent to which they were related to the context of the town and circumscribed by the power held by both the national and local state.

There was a substantial reading public in Birmingham and a disputing and discussing one.[141] Local and national publications were sold by small booksellers and read in a number of newsrooms, both private and public.[142] For example, when Edmonds ventured into publishing, he took rooms which could be used for reading, conversing and buying newspapers: he advertised the fact that the *Black Dwarf* and Cobbett's *Weekly Register* could be obtained there.[143] While debating societies such as the Birmingham Philosophical Society (1813) had a mostly middle-class clientele,

[141] See Chapter Two. E. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town: Birmingham and the Industrial Revolution* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), pp.165-7; S. Whyman, *The Useful Knowledge of William Hutton: Culture and Industry in Eighteenth-Century Birmingham* (Oxford: OUP, 2018), pp. 58-60.
[142] Langford, *A Century,* Vol. 2, pp. 496-7.
[143] *Edmonds's Weekly Register,* No. 6, 2 October 1819.

pubs provided more plebeian venues and a place where newspapers and pamphlets might be discussed.[144] Radical printers such as Joseph Russell reprinted popular radical texts, for example the *Political Catechism* he published in November 1816. This provided simple explanations of why a radical reform of Parliament was needed, giving examples of rotten and pocket boroughs, arguing for fairer representation, exposing corruption and connecting these issues to the prevailing distress.[145] Birmingham radicals also produced their own publications, for example the cheap *Reports* of political meetings which publicised the speeches and resolutions and acted as a calling card with fellow radicals.[146]

Birmingham radicals boasted about their educated artisan base. *The Addresser Addressed* of 1816 celebrated the capabilities of the new generation of reformers, educated in the Sunday Schools and Bible societies. 'Does not a man who knows how to read the Bible know how to read a History, a Newspaper or a Pamphlet....Having learnt to read, what is to prevent them acquiring sufficient knowledge, to enable them to distinguish right from wrong?'[147] The pamphlet was published by the Unitarian radical W. Hawkes Smith; the celebration of education and religious teaching in *The Addresser Addressed* suggests that the author could have been Edmonds, but the sentiments were shared by others, including Hawkes Smith himself. From January to August 1817, Hawkes Smith published his *Birmingham Inspector*, 'devoted to discussion of literary, scientific and political

[144] Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, p. 369. Friendly Societies, whether predominantly savings clubs or semi-trades unions in the period of the Combination Acts, were often based in pubs; see Behagg, 'Custom, Class and Change: the trade societies of Birmingham', *Social History*, Vol. 4, No. 3, October 1979, p. 461.
[145] HO 42/155 ff 26-31, November 1816.
[146] For example, BA&C 151005, *Report of the Proceedings of the Town's Meeting held on Newhall Hill Wednesday January 22nd1817* printed by W. Hawkes Smith. This was sold at the low price of two pence and set a pattern which was followed in subsequent periods of reform agitation.
[147] BA&C 64212, *The Addresser Addressed, or a reply to the Townsman of Bolton* (Birmingham, 1816).

subjects'.[148] This covered local affairs from a radical viewpoint, defended the Hampden Club and attacked Tory pamphlets. Smith also showed an interest in alternative solutions to poverty suggesting work-creation schemes and popular eating places, proposals which anticipate his later support for the ideas of Robert Owen.[149] Edmonds contributed a series on grammar and wrote several pieces on the behaviour of the local authorities – for example, over the Oliver affair – and the first *Letter To the Payers of Poor Levies in Birmingham.*[150] In Smith's 'Valedictory Address,' he regretted that more support had not been forthcoming, repeated the need for parliamentary reform and celebrated the good order that had emerged in 'Hayti' [sic] under Christophe compared to the state of government at home. That radicals in Birmingham were following the events of the Haitian Revolution is striking, and that Smith felt able to make this comparison suggests a readership familiar with the story.[151]

Edmonds continued his forays into print, first as a contributor to George Ragg's radical broadsheet, the *Birmingham Argus*, which combined discussion of political and cultural affairs with campaigning in defence of workers' combinations and radical booksellers.[152] Early in 1819 Edmonds embarked on a series of his own pamphlets, entitled *Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham* which focused on the local administration of poor relief and the question of political representation.[153] In June he launched *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder* which ran to eight issues, from June to

[148] *Birmingham Inspector,* No. 1, 4 January 1817.
[149] *Birmingham Inspector*, 1817, pp. 3-10, 114-118, 209-213.
[150] *Birmingham Inspector*, No. 11, 24 May 1817, pp. 209-213; No. 14, 5 July 1817, p. 296.
[151] *Birmingham Inspector*, No. 16, 23 August 1917, pp. 329-334.Edmonds was later to refer to San Domingue in 1833, see Chapter Six.
[152] British Library, *Birmingham Argus,* October 1818-January 1819; L. Brake and M. Demoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Academia Press, 2009), p. 55.
[153] *Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham*, II-IX, 1819. These were also published as '*Letters to the Payers of Levies'*. They were sold for 3d.

August 1819, followed by *Edmonds's Weekly Register* from 8 August 1819 to 6 January 1820.[154] He wanted to produce a more ambitious newspaper, and after an early attempt failed, persistence or obstinacy drove him, despite his impending trial, to acquire a printing press.[155] The new *Saturday's Register* duly appeared, 'printed by and for George Edmonds, 4 Union St', on 22 January 1820.[156] All three publications had a primarily political content, reporting on events in town and nation from a radical perspective expressed in the constitutionalist idiom. He challenged the Prince Regent's 'Proclamation' against seditious meetings: 'True loyalty is an attachment to the laws and constitution of the country and not to the persons who happen to administer them.'[157] He wrote accounts of sermons in local dissenting churches and rebuffed the suggestion from Carr's Lane minister John Angell James that God, being responsible for all things, was responsible for war.[158] He reported on his role as a newly elected member of the Board of Guardians.[159] A series on grammar, already an Edmonds preoccupation, was included together with standard provincial newspaper fare: literary and theatrical snippets and court reports.

Radical pamphlets and newspapers were countered by popularly written pamphlets with a Tory flavour, indicating that the town's loyalists understood that

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[154] *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder and Saturday Advertiser,* Nos. 1-8, 26 June to 7 August 1819*; Edmonds's Weekly Register,* Nos 1-19, 8 August 1819 to 6 January 1820.
[155] Notice of a Printing Press and Types, 5 December 1819 (no address), Warwickshire County Record Office; Warwickshire Printing Press Owners Records; Reference Number: *QS73*; Microfilm: *PG3282, from* Ancestry.com*. Warwickshire, England, Occupational and Quarter Session Records, 1662-1866 [database on-line].*
[156] *The Saturday's Register,* Nos 1-7, 26 January to 15 April 1820*.* Number 7, 15 April 1820 is the last extant issue and with Edmonds' trial imminent, might have been the final one, although Showell states that it was 'still alive in 1823', suggesting that Edmonds possibly continued it from jail and after his release, T. Harman and W. Showell, *Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1885), p. 302.
[157] *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder*, No. 7, 7 August 1819, p. 53.
[158] *Saturday's Register*, No. 1, 22 January 1820.
[159] See next section.

they had to engage with the population, not simply instruct them.[160] The Nott family, an imaginary family of artisans who had written loyalist pamphlets from the 1790s onwards, made a re-appearance. These pamphlets, which were marked by common-sense Toryism and a homely style, urged readers to stay away from political affairs and accept the status quo. They were joined by other characters, including 'Sam Tweezer', who contributed to *The Searcher*, a short-lived Tory journal produced in response to the *Birmingham Inspector* in 1817.[161] Sam Tweezer complained about Edmonds' language: 'Master Orator I should ha' got on much faster with ye' hadn't it been for your stuffing in so many o' your hard words…Why don't you speak plain, common Brummagem English as I do…'[162] In response, Hawkes Smith took *The Searcher* to task for publishing letters in this 'Brummagem' style. The people, would take it 'a poor compliment to be addressed in bad grammar and bad spelling'.[163]

The Searcher introduced what became a recurring theme in attacks on Edmonds: he had pretensions beyond his station and was stepping outside of his own sphere:

> Alas poor country! The nurse of heroes and statesmen, the land of Bacon and Newton; of Nelson and Wellington; of Chatham, Burke and Pitt! That their fate should 'in no small degree depend' upon the decisions of a

[160] Smith, *Birmingham Radicalism, 1817-181*9. The following comments about the Nott family and other loyalist publications draw on Harry Smith's discussion in Chapter Three of this dissertation.
[161] BA&C 496115, *The Searcher or an Inquirer after Truth* (Birmingham, March - May 1817).
[162] *The Searcher*, No. 4, 23 April 1817, pp. 60-61.
[163] *Birmingham Inspector*, No. 10, 10 May 1817, p. 192.

> Newhall Hill meeting and the parrot-taught eloquence of an obscure demagogue, is indeed a lesson to the pride of nations.[164]

This view of Edmonds as a demagogue, and one acting above his station, was to follow him throughout his political career. This was well-illustrated in the parody *The Orator Unmasked*, a ballad ostensibly written by Edmonds or 'Moses Meek'. After satirising Edmonds' early life and failure to settle to steady employment, this parody went on to suggest that Edmonds had joined the radical cause for personal aggrandisement and profit. It focused on his temerity in challenging the High Bailiff and Guardians and the dangers of standing up to the existing order:

> Come on all ye rebels, let none of us swerve
> The servants shall rule and the rulers shall serve
> I'll lead you most manfully into the fight
> And when you're in danger I'll creep out of sight.[165]

It is difficult to assess whether such satire and its accusations of both pride and cowardice had any effect on support for the radicals, but the intensity of the pamphlet war in 1819 suggests that both sides felt the need to engage with the other and that the loyalist authors wanted not only to answer the arguments of the radicals but also to mock their ambitions.

In the wake of Peterloo, the propaganda war intensified.[166] The Notts became more insistent that their readers should stay away from political affairs, referring

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[164] BA&C 496115, *The Searcher or an Inquirer after Truth*, No.1, p. 9, March 1817
[165] M. Meek (pseudonym), *The Orator Unmasked: a new serio-comic ballad by Moses Meek* (Birmingham, 1819).
[166] BA&C 61890 and 141480, Benevolus Letters (1819); BA&C 6276, Job Nott Junior *The Newhall Hill Meeting*, 8th ed. 1819; BA&C 65644, Rev J. Hume Spry, *The Duty of Obedience to Established*

to the aftermath of the French Revolution to justify their view that any rebellion produced a new set of less-welcome rulers: 'So neighbours, I will be contented and stick fast to our Laws and our glorious Constitution.'[167] Just as the radicals appealed to the constitution, so too did the Church and King party, but for the latter, this meant adherence to the status quo and acceptance of the privileges of Anglicanism.

Edmonds continued to be a favourite target of the Nott pamphlets. A remembrance from 1869 identifies the author as Theodore Price, a nail merchant, magistrate and gentleman of Harborne. On one occasion Price visited Edmonds, still keeping his identity as the author secret, urging Edmonds to interfere less with politics and concentrate on his family, but to no avail.[168] Edmonds thought that Reverend Edward Burn (1762-1837), minister of St Mary's Chapel, was behind the Nott pamphlets, a belief that may have sharpened his tone in his reply to Burns' pamphlet *A Word for my King, my Country and my God* in the autumn of 1819 in which he challenged Burns' assertion that reform led to revolution.[169]

Loyalist opposition to the radicals was organised by a 'Constitutional Society' which issued a Loyal Declaration in November 1819 and was signed by 4,600 residents.[170] The subsequent Loyal Association drew its membership from the Pitt Club, and included magistrates William Hamper, Theodore Price, William Bedford, N.G. Clarke

Government, *Extract from a Sermon Preached at Christ Church, Birmingham on Sunday 28 November 1819*.

[167] CRL, Birmingham Pamphlets, 1819, *A Third Letter from John Nott junior to his fellow townsmen* (second edition) (Birmingham, 25 October 1819).

[168] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 7 August 1869.

[169] *Edmonds's Weekly Register,* No. 6, 2 October 1819, No. 13, 20 November 1819. E. Burn*, A Word for my King, my Country and my God: being the substance of a discourse lately addressed to the congregation of St. Mary's, Birmingham,* 3rd edition (Birmingham, Beilby and Knotts, 1819).

[170] BA&C 259693, *The Loyal Declaration of the Inhabitants of Birmingham and its Neighbourhood*.

and Revd J.H. Spry.[171] Even the respected James Luckcock was attacked in the press and defended himself vigorously. Luckcock wrote to the *Gazette* explaining that he had not been involved in organising either of the previous Newhall Hill meetings but that he was collecting subscriptions for the suffering survivors of the Manchester events: 'The late proceedings … were so perfectly atrocious and anti-Christian.' [172] Luckcock's actions show that middle-class feelings were divided, even if many flocked to sign the Loyal Declaration.

As autumn gave way to winter in 1819, the propaganda war continued, but the weight of the local and national state was used against the radicals. Joseph Russell was already a target. In March 1819 he had been prosecuted for selling Hone's *Parodies*, which suggested a particularly severe policy on the part of the Birmingham magistrates, given that William Hone himself had been acquitted.[173] A number of arrests of those selling 'seditious' literature or signing handbills followed. Whitworth was arrested for signing 'a most inflammatory handbill' at the end of December.[174] George Ragg faced charges for selling *The Republican*.[175] Edmonds was himself charged with libel. An employee of his, a Mr Plastans, was seized by magistrates on the day of the Newhall Hill meeting and imprisoned, charged with previously making a false claim on the parish. Edmonds protested vociferously and accused the magistrates of persecuting Plastans in place of himself.[176] A further prosecution came from the lawyer Mr Spurrier who had been

[171] Behagg, *Politics and Production*, p. 90.
[172] Langford, *A Century,* Vol. 2, pp. 425-6.
[173] J. Russell, *The Trial of Joseph Russell for a Political Libel, being Mr Hone's Parody on the Litany* (Birmingham: Russell, 1819); Behagg, *Politics and Production*, p. 94.
[174] Langford, *A Century,* Vol 2, p. 430.
[175] *Birmingham Chronicle*, 11 November 1819.
[176] *Edmonds's Weekly Register,* Nos. 5 and 6, 25 September 1819 and 2 October 1819.

accused by Edmonds of using a spy to gather evidence for the prosecutions following the 12 July Newhall Hill meeting.[177]

Print was a vital medium for Edmonds, the radicals and their loyalist opponents, and the enthusiasm with which each side produced pamphlets suggests that these had a wide readership. Sharp exchanges were part of the rough-and-tumble of politics at the time, but there was a fundamental inequality underlying the use of print. The radicals were subject to prosecution for publishing and printing their views whereas the loyalists had the support of church and state.

Edmonds and his fellow radicals employed a variety of other tactics alongside speeches and pamphlets. Handbills posted around the town kept the radical presence visible: in Edmonds' letter to the 'Tradesman at Bath', he describes the dawn-to-dusk activity of himself and fellow organisers of the meeting which would have included bill-posting.[178] Petitions were the standard way for the unenfranchised to lobby Parliament and the method for collecting signatures, with petitions available in pubs, clubs and shops, encouraged participation.[179] The boycott of excisable goods was another tactic employed in 1819. In November, the Edmonds family joined in: 'An excellent and cheap substitute for coffee', being sold at the *Register* Office, price 1s per lb.[180]

Theatre and symbolism were vital for radical organisation.[181] In mid-June 1817, Birmingham radicals organised mass attendance at a Warwick County Meeting held

[177] *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder,* No.8, 14 August 1819, pp. 58-59.
[178] HO 43/3/41. 'Letter to a Tradesman at Bath'.
[179] *Report of the Proceedings,* 22 January 1817.
[180] *Edmonds's Weekly Register,* No. 13, 20 November 1819.
[181] J. Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England* (London: Breviary Stuff, 2014 [1994]), pp. 83-188; Belchem, *Popular Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, pp. 41-47.

on 18 June 1817, called to petition against the renewal of the Habeas Corpus Act. A flotilla of boats was kitted out to carry several hundred supporters via the Warwick and Birmingham canal while others made their way on foot.[182] At the Newhall Hill meeting of July 1819, the speakers drove in an open landau from Major Cartwright's lodgings preceded by large flags.[183] At the September meeting that followed Peterloo, a different mood was established: Sir Charles Wolseley arrived in a mourning coach, and the hustings were covered in black cloth. When Edmonds put the resolutions to the vote, black-gloved hands were raised in support.[184] The radicals also drew on the ritual of political dining. Although this may have been beyond the pocket of many, it did provide a means whereby radical speeches could be made in relative safety, visitors welcomed, and alliances cemented.[185] T.J. Wooler, who had launched his *Black Dwarf* in 1817, was welcomed to a dinner of about 300 people in August 1818, presided over by Sir Charles Wolseley; Thomas Clark's account suggests that this gathering enabled the Unitarian middle-class radicals to show their support for the radical cause.[186] If dining was on the respectable end of the spectrum of radical activity, church protests were on the other. In November 1819 Reverend Spry, vicar of Christ Church, delivered a sermon on the necessity of 'obedience to Civil Magistrates'. In response, the reformers organised a march of several hundred to Christ Church to protest. They sat through the service but at the end rose, put on their hats and marched out of church.[187] Meanwhile the theatre saw demonstrations of loyalism, with both performers and

[182] Rose, 'Political History', *VCH Warwickshire, Vol. Seven,* p. 288.
[183] *Report of the Proceedings, Monday, July 12th 1819* (Birmingham 1819).
[184] Belchem, *Orator Hunt*, pp. 127-8.
[185] P. Brett, 'Political Dinners in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain: Platform, Meeting Place and Battleground', *History*, Vol. 81, No. 264, October 1996, pp. 527-552.
[186] BA&C, MS 1114/8, T. Clark, Autobiographical Notebooks, Vol. 10, pp. 855-856**.**
[187] *Birmingham Chronicle,* 25 November 1819; Langford, *A Century*, *Vol.2*, p. 430. The *Chronicle* suggested that 'divine wrath' might be visited on the participants.

audience standing and singing *God Save the King*, 'interposing the most enthusiastic cheers between each distinct sentiment'.[188]

The occupation of a variety of spaces and places was an important component of cultural and political life. This might have a symbolic meaning but was also part of a struggle for the right to organise and have a voice. Katrina Navickas has argued: 'We should...examine the whole environment in which protestors acted: its space **and** place.'[189] The radicals and the Tories congregated in their own preferred pubs and clubs. The Cottage of Content on Sheepcote Lane hosted reform meetings in the 1790s and was a place for 'mechanics' to gather.[190] The Woolpack on Moor Street was the town centre venue for radicals from 1800 until about 1825 (See Map 2). 'Here George Edmonds and his friends got up the movement for the election of a "Legislatorial Attorney" and here old Thomas Wright Hill… would denounce the iniquity of the Test and Corporation Acts.'[191] Younger Hill family members and fellow dissenting radicals founded the Society for Literary Improvement at the Woolpack in October 1819, suggesting they found a respectable and relatively safe means of organising liberal sentiment in the period of loyalist hegemony.[192] Tory supporters traditionally gathered in the Minerva Tavern on Peck Lane. On one occasion they defenestrated the radical-leaning James Blisset: this became known as 'Blisset's

[188] Langford, *A Century,* Vol.2, p. 428.
[189] K. Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789-1848* (Manchester: MUP, 2016) pp. 4-19, quotation p.16. The stress is in the original.
[190] J. Townley, 'The Cottage of Content', BA&C, *The Iron Room* (Blog*)*, 2019, https://theironroom.wordpress.com/2019/05/13/the-cottage-of-content/ (accessed 7 June 2020). Other eighteenth-century venues included Freeth's Leicester Arms and the Robin Hood club, part of a vibrant pub and club culture in late eighteenth-century Birmingham described by John Money. J. Money, *Experience and Identity Birmingham and the West Midlands 1760-1800* (Manchester: MUP, 1977), pp. 98-117.
[191] E. Edwards, *The Old Taverns of Birmingham: a Series of Familiar Sketches* (Birmingham: E.C. Osborne, 1979), pp. 32.
[192] Ibid.

way out' and some years later George Edmonds found himself taking the same route.[193]

There was a more serious side to some exclusions. From the 1790s onwards, government and local authorities sought to restrict access to space, just as it did to print. A venue as a place might have a cultural and symbolic meaning, but as a space it could allow a movement to have a voice and presence.[194] This might apply to pubs or to the sites of public meetings. Access was linked to the question of who held power in the town. This was illustrated by the fact that the Hampden Club found it difficult to find a venue in town in the autumn of 1816.[195] According to Rowland Hill, this was because the magistrates threatened to take the licences away from those that gave the Club a room.[196] Eventually after at least five moves, the Club found a venue in private premises in Peck Lane.[197]

Newhall Hill itself came to have both physical importance and symbolic meaning. The first reform meeting on 22 January 1817 was called for 'the open ground … called Newhall Hill'.[198] The gathering established the pattern of Newhall Hill meetings for this period of reform agitation and the next. The hustings were erected on the wall of the house of Mr Docker of The Parade, a position where, according to a later account, 'the voices of most of the speakers reached to the outskirts of the great assemblage'.[199] Resolutions were printed in advance so that those who could not

[193] Edwards, *The Old Taverns of Birmingham*, pp. 12-13. This incident may have occurred slightly later in the nineteenth century, given that the author says that the 'ancient bitter antagonism was by then somewhat modified'.
[194] Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place*, pp. 4-19.
[195] BA&C 64212, 'Commercial Distresses, a Letter to the News', in *The Addresser Addressed, with other pieces* (Birmingham, 1816).
[196] R. and G.B. Hill, *Life of Rowland Hill*, p. 139.
[197] Dent, *Old and New Birmingham,* Vol. 2, p. 350.
[198] *Advertisement for a Town's Meeting*, 22 January 1817, reproduced in Langford, pp. 413-4.
[199] H. Martineau, *History of the Peace,* Vol. 2, p. 464. Mr Docker was a slater and is likely to be the 'Mr Docker' mentioned in the Bond Street Minute Book and a co-religionist of Edmonds.

hear could understand the proceedings.[200] The site became central to the reform campaigns.[201] The meetings may have been pieces of theatre, but they were also, in their occupation of space in the town, a challenge to the authorities. Harry Smith points out that although the Newhall Hill meetings did not include the military drilling and other symbols of those in the north, the Birmingham meetings would have almost paralysed the centre of the town because thousands of people assembling and processing would have meant that normal life ground to a halt.[202]

The culture of Birmingham radicalism was for the most part a very male one, but women were participants in the mass meetings and may have been present in clubs and pubs where radical business was discussed. However, there are no records of women's organisations to match the bands of Female Reformers who emerged in Lancashire.[203] In Birmingham there are only glimpses of a female presence. Elizabeth Martin was prominent in the 'Jabet' riot, 1816, as already noted. Large numbers of women and children were present at the Newhall Hill meetings. A grudging report in the *Gazette* acknowledging the size of the first Newhall Hill meeting, tried to downplay its importance by referring to the high proportion of women and children.[204] T.J. Wooler wrote of the Newhall Hill meeting that one of his sharpest memories was of 'the women and children who encircled the dense crowd of the male population'.[205] This image testifies to the fact that Wooler saw their participation as important but also to their being literally peripheral to the meeting. It

[200] BA&C 151005, *Report of the Proceedings of the Town's Meeting held on Newhall Hill, Wednesday January 22nd 1817.*
[201] D. Steele, #heritageofprotest, Sites in Birmingham, http://historyofpublicspace.uk/2020/05/27/heritageofprotest/ (accessed 12 June 2020).
[202] Smith, *Birmingham Radicalism 1817-1819* (Unpub. M. Phil Dissertation, University of Oxford, 2009), p.14. See Map Two.
[203] M. Bush, 'The Women at Peterloo: The Impact of Female Reform on the Manchester Meeting of 16 August 1819', *History,* Vol. 89, Issue 294 (April 2004), pp. 209-232.
[204] Langford, *A Century,* Vol. 2, p. 414.
[205] *Black Dwarf,* Vol. 7, No. 12, 19 September 1819.

suggests they were not organised in the way that the northern women were, some of whom occupied defined areas in the moorland meetings and who had a substantial role in the movement with their own societies.[206] Women reformers made a named appearance for the first time when ladies were admitted to the galleries of the dinner to welcome T.J. Wooler in 1822. A toast was raised to the 'Female Reformers', suggesting they were organised in some way. However, the author of the report nearly forgot to mention their presence, only remembering to do so when reporting on the toast.[207]

There is no sign of Edmonds being particularly concerned about the participation of women at this stage, and on at least one occasion his tone was patronising. In the *Weekly Recorder* of 17 July 1819, we learn that the editor had been planning to publish a letter from 'A Female'. Edmonds reported that her second communication had shown her to be so bigoted that he now declined to publish the first, and remarked: 'We have no doubt she will make a good wife, but we doubt whether she will ever make a good divine.'[208] Another female contributor was more to the editor's taste, having a poem published on 26 August 1819, in the first issue of *Edmonds's Weekly Register*.[209] Edmonds had yet to recognise the place of women in the reform movement.

Another way in which the culture of Birmingham Radicalism might have been exclusionary was in the adoption of antisemitic attitudes, especially in the casual and common elision of Jewishness and money-grabbing behaviour. McForan suggests

[206] Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space*, pp. 75-79.
[207] BA&C 63207*, Report of the Proceedings of the Public Dinner given in honour of Mr Wooler on his liberation from Warwick Gaol* (Birmingham, [1822]).
[208] *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder,* No. 4, 17 July 1819.
[209] *Edmonds's Weekly Register,* No. 1, 26 August 1819.

that this may have contributed to the tendency of Birmingham's small Jewish population to side with loyalism in 1819.[210] He cites an article by Edmonds as evidence of antisemitic attitudes held by radicals. However, in the article mentioned, called 'The Jew and the Christian', although Edmonds uses language which contributes to stereotypes – the Jew was 'a little dapper fellow'– the report is sympathetic to this character, who had been robbed. A report of another case in the Magistrates Court again identifies someone involved as Jewish, but with no specifically negative connotation attached. It is not possible to deduce Edmonds' attitudes from these limited examples.[211] Edmonds later collaborated with Mr Aaron in the anti-Church rates campaign suggesting he had friendly relations with him.[212]

Edmonds was involved in a wide variety of activities, literary endeavours and forms of propaganda. He had publishing ambitions of his own but his attempt, like those of W.H. Smith and George Ragg, was relatively short-lived. Birmingham radicals had access to a wide variety of cultural expressions and were opposed by a well-rooted strain of popular loyalism. However, these expressions were circumscribed by unequal relations of power. Radical printers and publishers were subject to harassment and arrest, pub rooms could be closed; the Reverend Spry could be subject to protest in church, but he still had the pulpit.

[210] McForan, *Birmingham Radicalism,* p. 184.
[211] *Edmonds's Weekly Register*, No. 4, 4 September 1819 and No. 6, 2 October 1819.
[212] See Chapters Seven. The question of the prevalence of antisemitism bears further investigation for both this period and that of the BPU. Thomas Attwood used antisemitic references, sometimes qualifying his remarks to make clear that he meant profiteering behaviour in general (Moss, *Thomas Attwood*, pp. 252, 322, n23).

Edmonds and town governance

From 1818 onwards, Edmonds took up issues specific to the town, first in his *Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham* and then in his newspapers, focusing on the local administration of poor relief, the Free Church controversy, and the question of political participation.[213] These issues touched the pockets of inhabitants, raised issues of corruption and privilege, and further extended his challenge to the town's leadership.

The most important of Edmonds' campaigns concerned the operation of the Poor Law in which he pursued a scandal surrounding the management of the Workhouse and extended this to an assault on oligarchic control within the town.[214] The administration of poor relief in Birmingham was in the hands of a local Board of Guardians, drawn from the two parishes of St Martin's and St Philip's. This Board, 108 strong, was elected triennially by ratepayers: those paying rates on a property worth £20 a year were entitled to stand as Guardians, while all householders assessed at £10 a year or more were entitled to vote.[215] There were enough elements of democracy in this system, despite its privileging of better-off ratepayers, for Edmonds and fellow-radical James Luckcock to work within it in their campaign for improvements and against corruption.[216] In practice, there was a considerable

[213] BA&C 74226, *Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham*, II-IX, 1819. Some of these were published as '*Letters to the Payers of Levies'* or '*Letters to the Parishioners…'*
[214] Recent discussion of poor relief in Birmingham in this period has focused on the management and life of the Workhouse and the Asylum for the Infant Poor, the challenge to corrupt practices, and questions of control; here the latter two points are the focus of discussion. Smith, *Birmingham Radicalism 1817-1819*, Chapter Two; M. Nejedly, *Child Labour in an Industrial Town: a Study of Child Workers in Birmingham, 1750 to 1880* (Unpub. PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2018); C. Upton, *The Birmingham Parish Workhouse, 1730-1840* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire, 2019).
[215] BA&C 'An Abstract of the Act, 23 George III. C54, 1801,'in BCol 41.11 *Birmingham Poor Law and Workhouse Miscellaneous Documents.* Sidney and Beatrice Webb refer to this as an 'exceptionally democratic Local Act' but one whose effective working depended on the behaviour of the electorate, Guardians and Overseers. S. and B. Webb. *English Local Government: Statutory Authorities for Special Purposes* (London: Longmans, 1922), pp. 144-145, 149.
[216] Smith, *Birmingham Radicalism*, Chapter Two.

element of self-selection in the choice of Guardians and the job with its attendant responsibilities was not always welcome. Edmonds' campaign challenged the assumptions made by both town establishment and wider populace about who was entitled to participate in town decisions.

The responsibility and costs of administering poor relief were considerable. Numbers in the Workhouse fluctuated, and although normally in the low hundreds, reached over 900 at one point in 1816 while many others received out-door relief. Children taken into the Asylum were taught, given work and could be apprenticed. [217] Edmonds described the effects of the post-war crisis: 'In the year 1816 the parish was overwhelmed...the poor, and the industrious poor, were literally dying from want...the workhouse besieged with petitioners for food and clothing.'[218] This pressure meant that 36 poor rates were levied within a twelve-month period in 1816-17, raising what one observer called the 'astonishing sum' of £60,214.[219] The need to support the poor, and the town's pride that it did so, existed in constant tension with a desire to minimise the costs and there were long-standing arguments about who should pay and how.[220] In 1818, the argument expanded to include questions of corruption as well as resentment at the levies. The Governor and some other

[217] M. McNaulty, 'Some Aspects of the History of the Administration of the Poor Laws in Birmingham between 1730 and 1834' (Unpub. MA Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1942); J. Reinarz and A. Ritch, **'**Exploring Medical Care in the Nineteenth-Century Provincial Workhouse: a View from Birmingham,' in J. Reinarz and A. Ritch (eds.), *Medicine and the Workhouse* (Rochester N.Y.: Rochester University Press, 2013), pp. 141-2; M. Nejedly 'Earning their keep: child workers at the Birmingham Asylum for the Infant Poor, 1797-1852', *Family & Community History*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2017), pp. 206-217; C. Upton, *The Birmingham Parish Workhouse,1730-1840* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire, 2019), pp. 7-22, 36-38.
[218] Edmonds, *Letter to the Inhabitants*, *VIII* (1819) p. 118.
[219] C. Pye, *A Description of Modern Birmingham in the Summer of* 1818 (Birmingham: J. Low,1820).
[220] Gill, *History of Birmingham*, p. 152; J.A. Langford, *A Century of Birmingham Life,* Vol. I, pp. 444-472; C. Upton, *The Birmingham Parish Workhouse,1730-1840* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire, 2019), pp. 7-22.

employees were sacked, but no public explanation was given.[221] The Guardians had, in fact, instituted a comprehensive report which identified wastage, negligence and corruption, but did not deem it necessary to publish this.[222] This led to criticism from a broad cross-section of ratepayers, in an open letter to the Overseers and Guardians, which called for a full statement and was signed by over 350 inhabitants, including the manufacturers John Turner and P.F. Muntz.[223]

Edmonds and George Ragg took up the issue in the latter's *Birmingham Argus* and Edmonds continued a campaign for improvements and accountability throughout 1819.[224] This allowed him to link questions of national and local governance: for example, he compared the corruption within the town's administration of poor relief with corruption in national government.[225] Edmonds combined this with an appeal to a growing democratic spirit, revelling in the fact that he was dubbed 'a public accuser'. Those in power objected to public discussions, he argued, because these tended to wake John Bull 'whom so many persons of the highest consideration have for a length of time been arduously engaged in the beneficial employment of rocking to sleep'.[226] Many payers of levies did not realise that they were entitled to have a say in the election of Guardians and the running of the parish. Goods went missing and contracts were awarded without proper oversight: 'Mr Jabet (the printer) seems to enjoy our

[221] BA&C, Birmingham Institutions B1, *The Plain Truth or a Correct Statement of the Late Events relative to the Birmingham Workhouse by HWS* (Birmingham: Printed for the author by W. Talbot), 1818.
[222] BA&C GP/B/2/1/2, *Birmingham Union Board of Guardians, Minutes 1807-1826*, 2 June 1818 'Report of the Investigating Committee'; Edmonds, *Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham* IX, 29 May 1819 and X, 5 June 1819. The full story was not made public until Edmonds reported on the affair once he had access to the papers the following year.
[223] *ABG*, 20 July and 10 August 1818. The signatories to the letter include several women – a reminder that in certain elections women ratepayers were enfranchised.
[224] *Birmingham Argus*, 21 November 1818; Edmonds, *Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham*, II-IX, 1819.
[225] Smith, *Birmingham Radicalism*, Chapter Two.
[226] Letter V, 24 April 1819 in *Letters to the Inhabitants*, p. 68.

parish patronage as a sort of heirloom...'[227] Some Guardians such as John Turner now recognised the problems, but should have spoken up earlier:

> Mr John Turner was so affected...in painting the abominations of the workhouse as to sob and cry like a child. I hope this gentleman will not attempt to cry himself into office again. Let us hope that the lachrymal fountain is exhausted and that he will be able to go through the election without any theatrical embellishments.[228]

The triennial elections for new Guardians at Easter 1819 became the focus for campaigning. Edmonds and James Luckcock put themselves forward for election, alongside others who wanted to see improvements and they organised an alternative list of candidates.[229] An unprecedented eighty members were newly elected. Edmonds was elected with 309 votes and Luckcock with 355.[230]

Once elected, Edmonds' continued his campaign for transparency and oversight, calling for a rotation system to combat the 'insulation of the committees'.[231] His detailed reports of Guardians' meetings in *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder* took transparency too far for his colleagues, and at a special meeting on 19 October, the Guardians agreed that minutes should not be published without the consent of the Quarterly Meetings.[232] Subsequently, the Guardians decided to make an annual

[227] Letter III, 26 Mar 1819 in *Letters to the Inhabitants,* p. 19.
[228] Letter IV, 3 April 1819 in *Letters to the Inhabitants,* pp. 34-52, p. 39. Edmonds seems to have particularly enjoyed teasing John Turner.
[229] Letter V, 24 April 1819 in *Letters to the Inhabitants*, pp. 54-80. Chris Upton points out that this was the first use of a slate or caucus in Birmingham politics, Upton, *The Birmingham Parish Workhouse,* p. 94.
[230] Letter VI, 1 May 1819 in *Letters to the Inhabitants,* pp. 82-96.
[231] Letter VIII, 22 May 1819 in *Letters to the Inhabitants,* pp. 113-128.
[232] GP/B/2/1/2 *Guardian Minutes*, Meeting, 19 October 1819. Those who were hostile to Edmonds probably felt their hand strengthened in the autumn of 1819 in the wake of his arrest.

report to levy payers. Edmonds' campaign for accountability was at least partially successful.[233]

If there are examples of Edmonds' intransigence in this aspect of his campaigning, there are signs too of pragmatism and practical cooperation. Once safely elected, Edmonds declared it was time to lay aside party spirit but added: 'Whoever accepts of the office of Guardian must attend to his duty. Guardians will in future be accountable beings.'[234] He used the same mix of conciliation and criticism once he saw the 1818 report on the workhouse scandal. He was clearly impressed, commenting that it had been drawn up in a 'gentlemanly, dignified and conciliating spirit' – but could not help pointing out that a lot of trouble would have been saved had it been made public at the time.[235] Edmonds and Luckcock took up roles on 'House Committee No. 4', responsible for inspecting the Workhouse.[236] Edmonds reported after his first visit that the Workhouse was a very 'dark, dirty and unhealthy place'. He supported a plan for employment and the provision of greater comfort and cleanliness, especially for the 'old women (who) eat, drink and sleep all in one room'.[237] The work of this committee produced improvements which continued in 1820. Both the 1818 Guardians' report and Edmonds' lobbying might be credited.[238]

If some Guardians were prepared to co-operate with the new intake, others were not. Edmonds' attention to his work as a Guardian was pursued in parallel to the events

[233] GP/B/2/1/2 *Guardian Minutes*, Special Meeting, 26 October 1819.
[234] Letter VI, I May 1819, in *Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham,* p. 90.
[235] Letter IX, 29 May 1819, pp. 129-144 and Letter X, 5 June 1819, pp. 145-160 in *Letters to the Inhabitants*.
[236] GP/B/2/1/2 *Guardian Minutes*, General Meeting 5 May 1819.
[237] Letter VII, 8 May 1819 in *Letters to the Inhabitants,* pp. 97-112.
[238] GP/B/2/1/2 *Guardian Minutes*, Quarterly Meeting 26 June 1819; BA&C, 202311 *Regulations for conducting the affairs of the Workhouse,* Birmingham: 1820, in B.Col. 41.11 Birmingham Poor Law and Workhouse Miscellaneous Documents; J. Fellows and C. Upton, 'Birmingham Workhouses', *The Birmingham Historian*, No. 4, 1989.

surrounding the July 1819 Newhall Hill meeting. When Isaac Spooner, a fellow Guardian, refused to take notice of a letter from him concerning an individual case, Edmonds publicly protested.[239] It is impossible to know whether Edmonds was aware that magistrate Spooner was at that point corresponding with Hobhouse in the Home Office preparing the charges against Edmonds and his fellow Newhall Hill speakers.

Notably, in his writings on this topic, Edmonds deliberately avoids seeing the poor as 'other':

> I have known instances where a family have sat in silent hunger during the dinner hour – the parents speechless with their utter inability to supply the wants of their children, and the children concealing their painful sensations out of affection to their parents – who had that very day paid their last penny. But for what? To support the poor? No to support a wicked and profligate system, equally adverse to the interests of all but peculating servants, or peculating guardians. [240]

Here, while Edmonds identifies with the family who are clinging to respectability, he does so in a way that turns resentment away from the poor and directs it towards corruption. Like many Birmingham inhabitants, he was aware of the narrow gap between respectable working poverty and destitution. His experience as minister's son in the Bond Street congregation would have brought this home. Indeed, he made this point in the first edition of *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder*: there were 'some

[239] *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder*, No. 5, 25 July 1819. This referred to a Mr Hubbard who had been denied assistance and whose apprentice son had been refused his wages. By convention, Spooner should have acted on the note from a fellow Guardian.
[240] Letter III, 26 March 1819, in *Letters to the Inhabitants* (1819), p. 27.

very respectable individuals living on parochial charity, who previously paid levies'. This was, perhaps, aimed at reminding his artisan, small master and shop-keeper readers that they too might face that situation.[241]

Edmonds' campaigning on this issue undoubtedly added to his popular standing. His role as a people's tribune is reflected in an item in *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder* of 7 August 1819. He reported on the 'shocking situation' in the Court of Requests jail and published a letter received from seventeen of the prisoners asking him to act for them.[242] The state of this prison attached to the small claims court was a scandal.[243] Known as the 'louse hole', the prison was in the basement of the Court of Requests building, from where the cries of the debtors could be heard.[244] The better-off could purchase marginally better conditions but the poor were relegated to straw bedding and overcrowding.[245] Edmonds wrote to the Governor of the Workhouse and established that the Commissioners of the Court could apply to the Parish for relief for those imprisoned.

Another focus for Edmonds' campaigning was the request by the trustees of the recently built Christ Church, whose building cost some £26,000, for a levy to pay off the outstanding debt. [246] This request to all levy-payers, whether Anglican or dissenting, to pay the bills associated with a new Anglican Church, aroused the ire of

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[241] *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder*, No 1, 26 June 1819.
[242] *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder*, No.7, 7 August 1819. The letter-writers included one woman.
[243] Even William Hutton, who was sympathetic to the institution compared to later critics, had acknowledged the deplorable state of the jail, W. Hutton, *The Court of Requests* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1840, [1787]).
[244] J. Dixon, 'Punishing Debtors: The Court of Requests,' http://mappingbirmingham.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/court-of-requests-high-street.html (accessed 3 December 2016).
[245] C. Upton, 'Heavy punishments 200 years ago', 14 May 2010, updated 30 May 2013, http://www.birminghampost.co.uk/lifestyle/heavy-punishments-200-years-ago-3931143 (accessed 3 December 2016).
[246] 'Letter to the Inhabitants, from George Edmonds,' *Birmingham Argus,* 31 October 1818; Dent, *Old and New Birmingham,* Vol. 2, pp. 306-7.

many inhabitants. In 1819, a meeting was requisitioned by some 150 ‘respectable names’ to petition against a renewed request for a levy.[247] Edmonds commented that he was glad to see others come forward, teasing John Turner for changing sides from a previous discussion.[248] His main target was the Reverend Spry of Christ Church:

> The Parish of Birmingham is at the time grievously oppressed with the support of the poor. Between sixty and seventy thousands a year is the annual expenditure of our parish. And yet this benevolent gentleman has the conscience to wish to put his Church among the list of paupers and to endeavour to get an almshouse built for himself...[249]

In the face of broad opposition, the Trustees’ proposal had to be withdrawn and other finance found.[250] Edmonds here took the opportunity to comment on ‘how it is that dissent has become so fashionable’. He thought doctrine was not the issue, ‘for as to doctrine I would as soon be a churchman as a dissenter’, nor was church government. Rather he blamed the behaviour of the clergy:

> How can the doctrines of the disinterested self-denying founder of Christianity be influential when they dribble from the lips of a money-hunting, preferment-hunting, power-hunting, fine house-hunting, mitre-hunting priest? What congregation can believe that their proud, aristocratic, pompous, people-abusing, people-defaming pastor is the

[247] Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, p. 353.
[248] BA&C 64070 G. Edmonds, ‘Letter One to the Payers of Levies of the Parish of Birmingham’, in *Letters to the Payers of Levies in the Parish of Birmingham on Various Subjects*, Third ed. (Birmingham: J. Osborne, 1819).
[249] Ibid, p. 14.
[250] BA&C 74226, G. Edmonds ‘Letter II’ in *Letters II-X to the Inhabitants of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1819); Dent, *Old and New Birmingham,* Vol. 2, pp. 307.

> representative of him who constantly devoted himself to the people, the poor people, the multitude, the mob, the rabble...[251]

If Edmonds' original impulse towards radical thought was partly rooted in his Baptist background, by now his hatred of privilege acted as confirmation of his very liberal dissenting Christianity.

Although there was no attack on the payment of the usual church rates at this point, pressure grew for transparency and democratic control. Edmonds successfully called for more thorough oversight of the church-wardens' accounts and praised the report of the committee appointed to do this: 'Order has been substituted for confusion, economy for imprudence, good-will for animosity...public confidence is discharged.' There are hints of Bentham's approach here, but with an added dash of Edmonds' lack of deference – he reminded his readers that when it came to elections for the Auditing Committee 'perhaps the Town may not be altogether unmindful of the individual at whose investigation the committee were appointed'.[252]

Edmonds campaigning on the issues of Poor Law administration, the Free Church question and the churchwardens' accounts raised the need for accountability and challenged the idea that local governance should be left in the hands of a small elite. His advice remained consistent: 'Whenever a public meeting is to take place, you may always conclude that you ought to be there, when every means is employed to keep you away.'[253]

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[251] Edmonds, 'Letter II' in *Letters II-X to the Inhabitants of Birmingham***,** p. 6.
[252] Edmonds, *Letter to the Inhabitants of Birmingham,* 12 March 1820, pp. 3-4.
[253] *Birmingham Argus,* 31 October 1818.

Trials

The indictment, trial and sentencing of Edmonds and his fellow Newhall Hill defendants was a long and convoluted process which took nearly two years. It unfolded in the torrid atmosphere engendered by the Six Acts, Cato Street and the Queen Caroline affair. 1820 was, writes Malcolm Chase, 'a year of political dislocation unparalleled in peace time'.[254] The *Birmingham Chronicle* expressed the Tory view of radicalism, which would, 'like a deluge or any other sweeping calamity,… efface all distinctions of rank, wealth, honours, virtue and every true genius'.[255] John Jaffray, writing in his 'Hints for a History of Birmingham' column thirty-five years later, said of this period: 'Freedom of speech and writing was at an end and the radicals were either exiled or silenced.' The 2,000-strong Union Society was broken up by a series of prosecutions and 'Reform seemed hopeless'.[256] Jaffray wrote within living memory and his version of events might have been taken from the remembrances of older radicals as well as the local press. He suggests that the movement was so crushed by the time of Edmonds' trial that 'not a remonstrance was issued or meeting held'. An examination of the events surrounding the trial and imprisonment should test his view.

Edmonds, Maddocks, Cartwright, Lewis and Wooler were first indicted by a Grand Jury at the Warwick Assizes on 9 August 1819 for seditiously meeting to elect a representative for Birmingham; the case was moved to the King's Bench for the defendants to plead at the following Warwick Assizes.[257] After several delays, the trial took place on 3 and 4 August 1820. Mr Denman appeared for Edmonds and

[254] Chase, *1820,* p. 2.
[255] *Birmingham Chronicle*, 6 April 1820.
[256] *Birmingham Journal,* 12 December 1855.
[257] *Morning Advertiser*, 11 and 14 August 1819.

Charles Maddocks, Mr Wooler for himself, while Matthew Hill, taking on his first big case, appeared for Major Cartwright. The jury returned its guilty verdict within twenty minutes.[258] Attempts were made to obtain a retrial on the grounds of the process used to assemble the jury, but these failed. Sentences were handed down on 1 June 1821 after pleas for mitigation. Major Cartwright was fined £100, the others were given terms of imprisonment: Edmonds for nine months, Wooler for a year, but Charles Maddocks, whose defiance in the dock unfortunately weighed against him, for eighteen months.[259]

The case became a *cause célèbre*, dividing opinion nationally and locally. Radicals and pro-Reform Whigs objected to both the charges and the legal process, especially the use of a Special Jury. Major Cartwright was a well-known veteran radical and T. J. Wooler used the *Black Dwarf* to comment on the case. In March 1820, the defendants gained an important supporter when Jeremy Bentham published his objections to the indictment: 'A prosecution, more palpably groundless than this… surely was never instituted.' Bentham suggested that there was nothing unlawful in appointing an agent to claim admission by a letter to the House of Commons, as MP for Birmingham. 'On receipt of this letter, the Speaker either gives the admission demanded, or he does not.'[260] Other established liberal figures gave their support at the trial itself. The *Black Dwarf* noted that two MPs, C. F. Palmer and

[258] *The Annual Register, 1820 Part II* (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1822**),** pp. 258-961; Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, pp. 434-6; Hills, *The Recorder of Birmingham* (London: MacMillan, 1878), pp. 51-51.
[259] *Evening Mail*, 4 June 1821; *Birmingham Chronicle*, 7 June 1821, Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, p. 438. W.G. Lewis had not objected to sentencing in the autumn of 1820 and had already begun his sentence. For Edmonds' plea for mitigation, which appears to have had some success, see Chapter Five.
[260] BA&C 444396, J. Bentham, *The King Against Edmonds and others, set down for Trial at Warwick on the 29th March 1820: Brief Remarks tending to show the untenability of this verdict* (London, 1820).

W. Williams, accompanied Major Cartwright and the other defendants.[261] There were also demonstrations of popular support. The court was full and on the evening of the first day, reported the sympathetic *Evening Mail*, the defendants 'were loudly cheered by the populace, which was considerable for a small town like Warwick', although the town was quiet when the result was known.[262] This is a different account from that of Jaffray, and suggests that Birmingham radicals had attended the trial and maintained their support alongside local sympathisers. Notes of thanks in the *Black Dwarf* show that collections were held for the prisoners during their stay in Warwick jail.[263]

The use of a Special Jury at both the indictment and the trial provoked the most comment. Four of the jurors at the trial were taken from a panel of 'esquires'.[264] The common jurors or talesmen made up the rest. Wooler was particularly coruscating about them: 'Shakespeare might have mended his description of Falstaff's regiment, from their appearance.'[265] The method used to establish the Special Jury was at the heart of Denham and Hill's attempt to get a retrial and Henry Brougham was in court to hear Hill's speech.[266] The press followed the case: the *Examiner* suggested that the 'esquires' on the jury had been hand-picked and that a number of those on the jury list for the original indictment appeared again on the list for the trial.[267] The *Birmingham Chronicle* stoutly defended the public spirit of the gentlemen who made up the Grand Jury in Warwickshire and other counties. They were not the ignorant,

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[261] *Black Dwarf,* Vol. 5 No. 6, 9 August 1820. Palmer and Williams were both 'advanced Whigs,' http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/palmer-charles-1771-1843; williams-william-1774-1839 (accessed 9 December 2018)
[262] *Evening Mail*, 7 August 1820.
[263] For example, *Black Dwarf*, Vol. 8, No. 9, 27 February 1822.
[264] *Evening Mail*, 7 August 1820. A potentially sympathetic juryman was not called.
[265] *Black Dwarf*, Vol. 6, No. 5, 9 August 1820 collected in BA&C 239497, *The Trial of Major Cartwright, Messrs Wooler, Lewis, Maddocks and Edmonds.*
[266] Hills, *The Recorder of Birmingham,* p. 51.
[267] *The Examiner*, 26 November 1820.

fox-hunting personages usually described by the Radical press, opined the *Chronicle.*[268]

None of the support from Whig and radical quarters made any difference to the outcome in the sharply divided atmosphere of 1820-21, but it may perhaps have softened the sentences. Some opponents still attempted to lengthen Edmonds' stay with a further prosecution. The day before he was to be freed, he was served with a detainer for £60 for roasting wheat.[269] Edward Edmonds tried to secure his release, but the family had no resources at this point. When the facts became known in Birmingham, a spontaneous subscription was raised and a deputation arrived to pay the fine and escort Edmonds home.[270] Wooler, still in jail himself, wrote:

> Treated, by the perversions of the laws, worse than an alien, worse even than a prisoner of war would have been treated by a generous conqueror and being aware that he himself had no motive but the public good, the conclusion in his bosom must inevitably be that his prosecutors were pursuing other interests.[271]

According to one obituary, Edmonds was welcomed by a huge crowd at the Bull Ring on his release.[272] There is no report of this in the local press, but this may reflect the attitudes of the publishers. It seems probable that if a deputation had been

[268] *Birmingham Chronicle,* 6 April 1820.
[269] This charge relates to the selling of a coffee substitute.
[270] *Black Dwarf*, Vol. 8, No. 14, 3 April 1822.
[271] Ibid.
[272] *Midland Counties Express*, 4 July 1868.

sent to escort Edmonds, other supporters would have turned out to greet him when he reached town.[273]

A series of other cases testifies to the way in which the radical movement was forced onto the back foot in 1820-21. Joseph Russell received an eight-month sentence for seditious libel. George Ragg and J. Osborne were prosecuted for publishing the *Black Book*, and Osborne again for a libel on the army: he was sentenced to a year in the House of Correction at Cold Bath Fields. W.G. Lewis was given a year for a libel on the Manchester magistrates which was added to his sentence for the Newhall Hill meeting: he spent two years in Oakham jail. Edmonds had been charged with the same offence and managed to get his sentencing deferred.[274] His tactic of making himself a nuisance in court seems to have been successful because by the time this and other cases came up, he was not given any additional sentence to add to his tally for the Newhall Hill rally. This applied to his prosecution for libel over the Plastans affair as well.[275]

These events cast a light on the extent of political repression and social division in Birmingham. Radicals spent time in jail and their families suffered. These facts seem to bear out Jaffray's reading of events. However, some sort of organisation continued: sympathisers organised as the Birmingham Patriots' Friends Society put on a grand dinner for T.J. Wooler on 29 July 1822. A procession, band, carriages with 'gentlemen wearing white wands and favours' met Wooler at the Mermaid on

[273] McForan, *Birmingham Radicalism*, p. 213, suggests that the dinner for Henry Hunt on 14 July 1823 was timed to celebrate Edmonds' release, but this reflects a misunderstanding about dates.
[274] Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, pp. 431-6.
[275] *Morning Chronicle* , 12 February 1821. The Plastans and Spurrier cases of libel came to haunt the town's authorities who tried to get the parish to pay for the prosecutions. See Edmonds' 'Letter to the Payers of Levies of the Parish of Birmingham' in *Black Dwarf*, Vol. 7, No. 6, 8 August 1821; *Morning Advertiser,* 7 February 1822; *Birmingham Chronicle,* 18 April 1822.

the Warwick Road and, stopping several times for speeches, wound its way into town, past Edmonds' rooms in Union Street and to Lawrence Street 'where the amphitheatre shook with shouts and applause on entry'. The gentlemen included Thomas Northmore, founder of the Hampden Club. [276] Edmonds chaired this dinner, as he did the one for Charles Maddocks held on 22 October.[277] The following year the radicals were able to put on another show for a visit by Henry Hunt, although this was less well-attended than that for Wooler.[278]

Edmonds' behaviour and ideas in this period were those of an assertive popular radical leader. He demonstrated this by chairing the Hampden Club, organising mass meetings and defying the town leadership in print. This audacity was nevertheless combined with caution at times, demonstrated in his wariness during the Oliver affair, and the care with which he approached the post-Peterloo meeting. This behaviour might appear contradictory but could also be the behaviour of a responsible plebeian leader. His capacity for invective, use of sarcasm and frontal attacks on existing authorities testify to his considerable ego, probably needed for him to survive in public life. His speeches and writings of the time suggest that he took pains to keep a broad appeal, referring to 'general suffrage' at least until 1818. In his writing he kept within the constitutionalist idiom of the time. However, he delivered a conscious attack on the assumptions made by the elite, on their right to run things in the town. He pushed the boundaries of a constitutionalist approach and

[276] BA&C63207 *Report of the Proceedings of the Public Dinner given in honour of Mr Wooler on his liberation from Warwick Gaol* (Birmingham, 1822). Attwood sent a letter in which he declined to attend but it had a friendly tone. Edmonds' remarks at this dinner are discussed in Chapter Six.
[277] *Black Dwarf,* Vol. 9, No. 18, 30 October 1822.
[278] *ABG*, 21 July 1823. The dinner for Henry Hunt is described in Chapter Six.

challenged prevailing deference. For all Edmonds' insistence on staying within the law, he was firmly within the popular wing of popular radicalism at this point.

Birmingham experienced neither riots, such as those of Spa Fields, nor an uprising like Pentrich in Derbyshire. There was no March of the Blanketeers and no Peterloo. To that extent, it experienced less tension and division than some other industrial areas. The radicals were not faced with the degree of hostility that was experienced in Manchester. The magistrates and officers took pains to avoid serious trouble at the Newhall Hill meetings. They did not attempt to prevent the meetings taking place and avoided provoking the crowds. However, the records show that they acted hand-in-glove with the Home Office and, when called upon to co-operate in the repression of 1819, did so with enthusiasm. Radicals were harried, prosecuted and targeted by loyalist propaganda, especially in late 1819. Edmonds wished to involve reformers from the middle class but support from this quarter was limited and intermittent. Thomas Attwood cooperated with Edmonds on the 'Distressed Mechanics Petition' but was not yet convinced of the need for serious political reform and concentrated on his currency arguments.[279] The Whigs were weak nationally and locally. Birmingham, with a substantial Whig-leaning middle class, many of them Unitarians, might have been expected to buck the national trend of Whig quiescence, but active support for the radical cause was at this time limited to a few families and individuals.

In this situation, Edmonds and fellow Birmingham radicals acted independently, drawing on a culture of education and discussion, using theatre and space to assert their rights and engaging with popular loyalism. The national radical press was

[279] T. Attwood*, The Remedy, or Thoughts on the Present Distresses* (London, 1816); Moss, *Thomas Attwood,* Chapters Three and Four; Wakefield, *Life of Thomas Attwood*, pp. 57-61; Ward, *City-State and Nation,* pp. 22-25.

widely circulated, the Birmingham Hampden Club kept in touch with the radical movement elsewhere. The events of 1819 and their aftermath show that Birmingham played a significant role in the popular radical movement in this period.

Chapter Five

FALL, RECOVERY AND A NEW CAREER (1816-1836)

This chapter focuses on Edmonds' working and family life during the two decades from 1816 to 1836, in which he kept school, published newspapers, was prosecuted and jailed, and began a new career in the law. He moved from the status of a convicted felon to that of an attorney's clerk. The chapter examines how Edmonds and his family were able to make this transition, exploring both barriers and sources of support.

Discussions of social mobility in Birmingham have focused on a number of factors: the ability of craftsmen to become masters, the early absence of borough status, and the influence of nonconformism.[1] Susan Whyman has suggested that in the late eighteenth century, 'rough diamonds' – individuals with little formal education – were able to use Birmingham's literary and entrepreneurial culture to improve their status, despite facing prejudice.[2] Recent attention has been paid to the role of entrepreneurship in the late nineteenth century with different interpretations advanced by Frances Carnevali and Jennifer Aston and Smith, Bennett and van Lieshout.[3] However, Edmonds' journey does not fit easily into existing models. Although he shared the 'rough diamonds' interest in self-improvement, he had

[1] W. Hutton, *An History of Birmingham*, 2nd ed. (Birmingham, 1783), pp. 83-6; S. Timmins (ed.), *The Resources, Products, and Industrial History of Birmingham, and the Midland Hardware District* (Abingdon, 2009 [1866]); A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: Odhams Press, 1963), p. 189.
[2] S. Whyman, *The Useful Knowledge of William Hutton: Culture and Industry in Eighteenth-Century Birmingham* (Oxford: OUP, 2018), pp. 150-154.
[3] See Chapter Three. F. Carnevali, J. Aston, 'Victorian Capitalists and Middle-Class Formation: Reflections on Asa Briggs' Birmingham' in M. Taylor, *The Age of Asa* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 79-89; H. Smith, R. Bennett and C. van Lieshout, 'Entrepreneurship in Birmingham and Manchester, 1851-1911: A Tale of Two Cities?', *Midland History*, published on line 17 September 2020. DOI: 10.1080/0047729X.2020.1814641.

benefited from a good home education. His early interest in mechanical inventions did not bear fruit and was replaced by his political activities and the need to make a living. He formed acquaintances in well-connected Unitarian radical circles, but these were limited; his own Baptist background did not afford the same connections.

Edmonds attempted to improve his occupational and social status by becoming a lawyer, but this was at a time when there was a drive from within the profession to raise standards and control entry. Alongside this, suggests Penelope Corfield, social, cultural and economic barriers were reinforced.[4] The Birmingham Law Society (BLS) was one of the earliest formed; in Sally Hoban's recent history of the BLS, she describes the Society's attempt to reform professional standards and the place of its dispute with Edmonds in this professionalisation drive.[5] This chapter takes a more detailed look at the opposition Edmonds faced and asks what is revealed about the attitudes of this segment of Birmingham's middle class.

The chapter also examines the impact of Edmonds' trial and imprisonment on the family and the ways in which it dealt with hardship and insecurity, reaching a more comfortable, if still precarious, existence by the mid-1830s. The position of women in relationship to both employment and the family in nineteenth-century Birmingham has been discussed by Leonora Davidoff and Catherine Hall, who suggest the growth of separate spheres in the period and Fiona Terry-Chandler, Kathleen Jenns and Jennifer Aston, who disagree about the extent of this development. How does

[4] P. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 12-13, 82-85; J. Garrad and V. Craft, 'Professional and Middle-Class Identity: Solicitors and Gas Engineers c.1850 – 1914', pp. 148-168 in A. Kidd and D. Nicholls (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle Class: Studies of Regional and Cultural Diversity since the Eighteenth Century* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998); B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People: England 1783-2006* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), pp. 149-150.
[5] S. Hoban, *Our Legal Community: Two Hundred Years of the Birmingham Law Society* (Birmingham: Birmingham Law Society, 2018).

Patience Edmonds' experience confirm or counter the various analyses?[6] The chapter also explores the degree to which Edmonds' political views rebounded on his personal and professional life. Edmonds was adversely affected by his conviction and imprisonment and the chapter asks to what extent he was able to overcome prejudice and who provided support. The extent and limitations of his rehabilitation cast light on aspects of Birmingham's social and political life in this period.

Details of the life of Edmonds and his family in this period are fragmentary but press accounts, both sympathetic and hostile, have been used to piece together events. The main primary source used is the *Records and Minutes of the Birmingham Law Society.*[7] These include a record of the founding members, lists of the officers and minutes of regular meetings. The minutes are not verbatim, were probably subject to self-censorship and rarely reveal individual members' attitudes, but it is possible to trace the overall stance taken by the Society. Eliezer Edwards' account of Edmonds' legal career describes his starting point as an unqualified practitioner but does not explore the opposition he faced**.**[8] His description of Edmonds' performance in court verges on the hagiographic but he balances this with critical comment. The Tory-supporting *Monthly Argus* gives a flavour of some hostile attitudes to Edmonds' legal

[6] L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987); F. Terry Chandler, 'Women, Work and the Family in Birmingham 1800-1870' (Unpub. PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1995); K. Jenns, 'Female Business Enterprise in and around Birmingham in the 19th and 20th Centuries' (Unpub. PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1997); J. Aston, *Female Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century England: Engagement in the Urban Economy* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016).

[7] BA&C MSS 2830, *Records and Minutes of the Birmingham Law Society from 3 January 1818 to 31 October 1857,* Minute Book A 1818-1857, hereafter *Records and Minutes.*

[8] E. Edwards, 'George Edmonds', *Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men* (Birmingham, 1877).

ambitions. Press reports from the local Magistrates' Court provide a glimpse of Edmonds' performances in court and the cases he took up.

The first section of the chapter examines Edmonds' working and family life to the mid-1820s and the family's precarious position. The next section explores Edmonds' status in the town in the 1820s and the opposition he encountered. Finally, there is a detailed description of his attempt to make a living as a lawyer and an analysis of the forces ranged against him as well as the support he received. This overlaps with the period in which he was centrally involved in the Birmingham Political Union which is described in the following chapter.[9]

Work and family life, 1817-1827

In this decade, Edmonds and his family were affected by political turmoil and personal misfortune and this section considers how they navigated these challenges. It examines George's attitude to his occupation as schoolmaster, how he responded to family responsibilities, and the role of Patience Edmonds in the family's survival.

Edmonds ran his school in Church Street throughout most of the period of intense radical activity, 1816-19.[10] The extent to which these activities affected patronage of the school is uncertain. After Edmonds signed Hampden Club statements in the autumn of 1816, he faced criticism in the press which referred to his status as a schoolmaster. The *Courier* suggested that Edmonds kept 'a petty school to teach reading and writing, having failed in the laudable endeavours to get his bread as a strolling player…' A correspondent in the *Morning Chronicle* defended him: the

[9] See Biographical Timeline, p. xii.
[10] *Wrightson's Triennial Directory, 1818*, G.W. Edmonds, Academy, Church St. The establishment of this school is described in Chapter Three.

school was ‘as respectable an academy as any in the town of Birmingham’.[11] This suggests that Edmonds’ clientele, probably mostly dissenting, and from the lower middle class, continued to give their support. There are signs, though, that he came under pressure to pay his work more attention: in the summer of 1817 he declared he would devote his undivided attention to the school.[12] By January 1819 he was able to place a notice in the *Birmingham Argus*, celebrating the fact that he had been able to maintain the school ‘spite of a few instances of Persecution and Bigotry’ and that the ‘liberal patronage which he continues to enjoy is a source of pleasure, as it proves … that a man may safely discharge his public Duty, without a sacrifice of the Duty he owes to his Family’.[13]

Despite this apparent success, Edmonds was inexorably drawn towards radical activity and began publishing his *Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham*, sold for 3d.[14] Whatever the impact of these pamphlets on public sentiment, they do not appear to have been a commercial success. In May and June 1819 an appeal was made by friends of Edmonds for a subscription to defray expenses in connection with his campaigning on the Poor Law.[15] This appeal was attacked in the pages of the *Birmingham Argus*, edited by George Ragg, but was defended by ‘Harry Long-Legs’ in a letter to the *Lichfield Mercury*. The letter writer, possibly Edmonds himself, pointed out that Edmonds had received no remuneration from the Hampden Club and made little profit from selling his *Letters*.[16] The incident suggests that Edmonds

[11] *Morning Chronicle*, 1 November 1816. The ‘Courier’ referred to is possibly the *London Courier and Evening News.* The letter also denies the suggestion that Edmonds had ever been a ‘strolling player’, a libel which later found its way into attacks made by Joseph Allday.
[12] *London Courier and Evening News,* 29 July 1817.
[13] *Birmingham Argus*, 16 January 1819.
[14] BA&C. *Letter One* and *Letters Two-Ten to the Inhabitants of Birmingham* (Birmingham,1819).
[15] C. Maddocks, *Copy of Circular Letter*, in BA&C, Birmingham Scrapbook, Volume 1 Part 2A.
[16] BA&C MS 390/58 *‘To the Editor of the Lichfield Mercury*’, 17 May 1819. Editions of the *Birmingham Argus* for this period are not available.

and George Ragg had fallen out.[17] Undeterred, Edmonds embarked on the publication of *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder* in June 1819. He must have had some faith that his paper would sell: just before its launch, he gave up his school, which was taken over by his fellow radical, Charles Maddocks.[18] He acknowledged the need to make a living from the new venture, indicating in the first issue that 3½d of the 4d charge went to the government and apologising for the price. While he could live on bread and water, he could not expect his family to do so.[19] We do not know if this was any comfort to Patience, who was expecting their second child. Clarissa was born on 22 July 1819, ten days after the Newhall Hill meeting.[20] Edmonds continued his publishing venture with *Edmonds's Weekly Register,* 8 August 1819 to 6 January 1820, followed by the fortnightly *Saturday's Register* which ran until at least April 1820. This was printed on Edmonds' own printing press which he had acquired and registered in December 1819.[21] He was by then maintaining rooms at 4 Union Street which sold the radical press and, from November 1819, a coffee substitute, which may have gleaned a small profit.[22]

The next challenge was to prepare for Edmonds' trial and likely imprisonment. Edmonds asked his friends to give their patronage to a boot and shoe business to be run by Patience.[23] In January 1820 the following notice appeared:

> Mrs Edmonds respectfully informs her friends that she has accepted an Agency for the sale of boots and shoes under her relative Mr A. E.

[17] Edmonds exhibited a tendency to fall out with people, as discussed below.
[18] CRL 1962607x, 'Advertisement' bound with *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder,* No. 6, 31 July 1819.
[19] *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder,* No. 1, Saturday June 26th 1819, p. 1.
[20] *England & Wales, Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Registers*, *1567-1970*, RG4/Piece 3113: Birmingham, Bond Street (Baptist), 1775-1837, birth of Clarissa Edmonds, 22 July 1819.
[21] See Chapter Four for more details.
[22] *Edmonds's Weekly Register,* No. 6, 2 Oct 1819, p. 49; No.13, 20 November 1819, p. 104.
[23] *Edmonds's Weekly Register,* No. 16, 11 December 1819, p. 128.

> Edmonds who has commenced the above business for the benefit of herself and her family at the *Register* Office.[24]

It seems most likely that this was Amos Edmonds, the most commercially successful of George's uncles, who was in the gun trade but apparently willing to fund a different enterprise.[25] A great deal of responsibility fell on Patience Edmonds' shoulders in this period. She had seen Edmonds give up his school for the uncertain career of publishing a radical journal. Besides having to manage a boot and shoe business at the Union Street Rooms, she had a babe-in-arms, Clarissa, and the severely disabled Horace to care for and must have been anxiously anticipating Edmonds' trial. Despite these pressures, the impression given in a letter from Edmonds to Patience, published in the *Saturday Register* of 4 March 1820, is of an affectionate partnership. Edmonds was being held in the Moor Street jail in connection with the Spurrier affair and found himself up before magistrate Reverend John Hume Spry to obtain bail. 'Well imagine you see me with a most good-tempered countenance, and with a modesty something like that which I manifested when I first came a-courting.' Eventually the matter was settled, Edmonds' friends and family rallied round, and he was home by the evening. While the letter is written with an eye for public consumption, its light and affectionate tone suggests that Patience Edmonds continued to support her husband in his varying commitments.[26]

However strong these family relationships, the Edmondses were under intense pressure. According to the *Orator Unmasked*, George and his father had been at loggerheads over Edmonds' activities in 1819, and while the ballad is likely to have

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[24] *Edmonds's Weekly Register,* No. 19, 8 January 1820, p. 152.
[25] See Chapter Three for Amos Edmonds.
[26] *The Saturday's Register*, No. 4, 4 March 1820, pp. 103-107. Despite Edmonds' uncharacteristic deference, Spry had at first insisted on setting a high bail amount but was persuaded to reduce it. For the Spurrier affair see Chapter Four.

exaggerated their disagreements, the dangers incurred at the time were bound to have alarmed his family.[27] Tragedy struck in summer 1820. George's mother, Sarah, died the day after Edmonds' trial and conviction. The notice in the *Birmingham Chronicle* suggests that this was after 'a few hours illness', which might imply an attack of some kind.[28] There is no printed comment on this event in local, radical or Baptist sources, so it is only possible to imagine the swirling mixture of emotions in the family and the burden of both anger and guilt that fell on the son. Edmonds never appears to have directly commented on his mother's death in later speeches, but this event would have been in his mind, and those of his listeners, when he or others referred to sacrifices made.[29] At this point the Bond Street Chapel would have provided essential support to the Edmonds family, while the wider Baptist community provided financial assistance. In an arrangement that may have already been in hand, Thomas Morgan became co-pastor to Reverend Edmonds, who was now 70. A subvention of £16.17s was given to the Reverend Edmonds by the Society for the Relief of Aged and Infirm Ministers.[30] Edward Edmonds, who died in March 1823, at least lived to see his son released from jail and re-established as a schoolmaster.[31]

Edmonds' speech for mitigation of sentence made in June 1821 casts some light on the family's circumstances. He indicated that he had 'the symptoms of pre-disposed apoplexy, and had been subject to attacks of that disorder, which occasionally

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[27] M. Meek (pseudonym), *The Orator Unmasked: a new serio-comic ballad by Moses Meek* (Birmingham, 1819).
[28] *Birmingham Chronicle*, 10 August 1820, confirmed in *Staffordshire Advertiser,* 12 August 1820: 'On Saturday, Sarah, wife of the Rev. E. Edmonds and mother of Mr George Edmonds, the Reformer.' Sarah was 59.
[29] The juxtaposition of George's conviction and Sarah's death has only come to light in the course of this research. Sarah's death is registered as taking place a year later: Sarah Edmonds, d. 5 August 1821, RG4/3113: Birmingham, Bond Street (Baptist), 1775-1837. This may have arisen because of an error in transcribing by Mr Lowe, the deacon.
[30] *Baptist Magazine*, Vol. 12, September 1820. p. 381. The object of the Society was to relieve ageing ministers from some of their work.
[31] *Baptist Magazine*, Vol. 14, 1823, p. 208.

deprived him of all sensation', and that his wife was 'reduced to a state of delirous [sic] debility'. These claims could have been exaggerated for effect, but he produced medical evidence to back up his reference to a predisposition to apoplexy. A 'medical gentleman', Mr Stephen West Oliver, gave his opinion 'that confinement and want of fresh air would probably be attended with fatal consequences'.[32] Edmonds also referred to his being the father of three helpless children and this was one of the few occasions when he spoke about Horace's disabilities.[33] The identity of the third child is unclear, but George and Patience may have already taken in the eldest child of his brother, Edward.[34]

Edmonds would have found it difficult to support his family in the period before his sentencing and almost impossible when incarcerated. His 1821 *Letter to the Payers of Levies of the Parish of Birmingham*, written from jail about the Plastans affair, stated that 'my family is altogether unprovided for'.[35] Collections continued, organised by radicals locally and nationally.[36] A 'George Edmonds, late of Birmingham', appeared in the list of petitions of insolvent debtors heard at Warwick on 2 March 1822.[37] However, the Edmondses managed to retain the rooms in Union

[32] *Birmingham Chronicle*, Thursday 7 June 1821. The term 'apoplexy' was used at the time to describe cerebrovascular events and the phrase 'predisposed to apoplexy' had come into use, P. Pound, M. Bury, S. Ebrahim, 'From apoplexy to stroke', *Age, Ageing*, 26 (1997), pp. 331-337. When Edmonds was admitted to hospital at Abington Abbey in Northampton in 1868, he was recorded as suffering from asthma (See Chapter Nine). There is no way of knowing whether there was any kind of connection between the conditions. Serious concerns were also expressed about Edmonds' health at the time of his release from jail: *Black Dwarf,* 3 April 1822.
[33] *Birmingham Chronicle*, 7 June 1821.
[34] A death notice for a Caroline Edmonds, 'eldest daughter of George Edmonds of this town', appears in *Aris's Gazette*, 28 February 1825 but no such death or equivalent birth can be traced. There is no reference to a third child in the Bond Street register, RG4/3113, which contains the Edmonds family births and deaths. For Edward Amos Edmonds and family, see Appendix B.
[35] *Black Dwarf*, Vol. 7, No. 6, 8 August 1821.
[36] *Oxford University and City Herald,* 21 August 1819. See also Chapter Four.
[37] *The London Gazette*, Part 1, 1822, p. 255.

Street, and Patience continued the boot and shoe trade from there.[38] The printing press was given up at some point: certainly Edmonds' 1825 *Letter to the Payers of Levies of the Parish of Birmingham* of 1825 was printed and published by W. Cooper.[39]

Edmonds recommenced his work as a schoolmaster sometime after his release from jail in March 1822 and appears to have been reasonably successful in regaining patronage. He felt confident enough to put what Eliezer Edwards called a 'characteristic' advertisement in the press in July 1823, announcing that the school was so successful that he had taken on new 'extensive' premises opposite Bond Street Chapel:

> ...To his enemies – if it be possible that he can have any – G.E. offers the most entire absolution from their sins against the best of men, on the following reasonable terms: That they henceforth zealously trumpet his merits; and on his part he agrees to receive their children at his academy, as hostages for the performance of these conditions. *Quid Rides?*[40]

Edwards' interpretation of this advertisement has been the source of a misunderstanding about the date of Edmonds' release from jail. Edwards thought it implied he had only just been released but this was not the case. *Wrightson's Directories* confirm that Edmonds maintained an Academy at Bond Street in 1823, and in 1825 he appears as a 'private teacher' with his address as St Luke's Row.[41]

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[38] For example, the pamphlet reporting the dinner for T.J. Wooler in July 1822 'may be had at Mr Edmonds's Coffee Rooms, Union Street', *Report of the Proceedings of the Public Dinner given in honour of Mr Wooler.*

[39] BA&C, 60381 G. Edmonds *Letter to the Payers of Levies of the Parish of Birmingham* (Birmingham,1825 nd. ?1825).

[40] Cited in E. Edwards, 'George Edmonds'. 'Quid Rides?' is probably a reference to Horace's aphorism: 'Quid rides? Mutato nomine et de te fabula narratur'. (Why do you laugh? Change only the name and this story is about you). It has not been possible to trace the original of the advertisement.

[41] *Wrightson's Triennial Directory for Birmingham,* 1823 and 1825.

This was situated at the bottom of Constitution Hill, opposite Bond Street, as described in the advertisement (see Map 2).

The Edmondses, then, seemed to have recovered their working and domestic lives by the mid-1820s. George maintained his school, and Patience the boot and shoe concern. It is likely that they now lived in the St Luke's Row property. In the Autumn of 1826, Patience gave up the shoe business which was put up for sale. It was advertised in *Aris's Gazette* in October 1826 as an 'Advantageous Offer', with all its stock, fixtures and good will.[42] This commercial activity carried out by Patience in the respectable retail trade, and her exit from it six years later, follows the pattern identified by Leonora Davidoff and Catherine Hall where women of the middle class might take on such activity out of financial necessity but remove themselves from it when times were better. One of Davidoff and Hall's examples comes from another Baptist family: Reverend Thomas Morgan's wife kept school in the 1810s when Thomas was ill, but gave it up on his recovery. [43] Critics of the Davidoff and Hall thesis have found that female entrepreneurship and employment was greater overall than Davidoff and Hall suggest, but do not dispute the existence of this pattern. Patience Edmond's experience, like that of Mary Phipson, identified by Kathleen Jenns, tends to confirm that it existed.[44] Her contribution to the survival and recovery of the Edmonds family had been vital, whether in childcare, household management or maintaining a business. She might have reasonably been looking forward to a period of stability.

[42] *ABG,* 23 October 1826.
[43] Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 272-315.
[44] Terry Chandler, *Women, Work and the Family in Birmingham 1800-1870*, pp. 10-35; Jenns, 'Female Business enterprise in and around Birmingham in the 19th and 20th centuries'; Aston, *Female Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century England*, pp. 53-102.

George, however, was growing weary of keeping school. Eliezer Edwards tells us that the life of a schoolmaster 'appears to have been, to him, somewhat of a drudgery; and he longed for more active duties, and a larger sphere of work'.[45] What might be the positive and negative aspects of life as a schoolmaster of a proprietary school in this period? Such a teacher might have a degree of independence and relatively free rein. Edmonds would have been familiar with the modern and liberal approach to education advanced by the Edgeworths and subsequently by the Hills at Hazelwood.[46] Influential Baptist thinker Robert Hall argued that education was crucial in liberating the permanent 'moral and spiritual worth'.[47] Edmonds regularly expressed the view, common among popular radicals, that education promoted independence of thought.[48] However, a schoolmaster in charge of a small Birmingham day school, no matter how respectable, might be pressed to remember the great moral purpose of education. Dependent on local families who might not welcome experimentation, and possibly plagued by unruly pupils, this was a far cry from Hazelwood school with its wealthy Unitarian patrons, comfortable buildings and curriculum designed by a whole enthusiastic family.[49] Whether or not Edmonds found the life a 'drudgery' or whether the school became less successful, it is not possible to tell, but by 1827 he was appearing as a representative in the local courts and there is no Edmonds school in Pigot's list of 'Academies, Seminaries and Public

[45] Edwards, 'George Edmonds'.
[46] R. Watts, 'Joseph Priestley and his Influence on Education in Birmingham', in M. Dick (ed.), *Joseph Priestley in Birmingham* (Studley, 2005), pp. 48-64.
[47] R. Hall, 'The Signs of the Times, Sermon preached at Bristol for the National Schools November 28th 1820', in O. Gregory (ed.) *The Miscellaneous Works and Remarks of the Reverend Robert Hall with a Memoir of his Life* (London: Henry Bohn, 1849), pp. 414-422.
[48] *A Letter to the Inhabitants of Birmingham being a vindication of the conduct of the writer at the late Meeting at the Shakespeare, February 11th 1817* (Birmingham, 1817); *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder and Saturday Advertiser* No.8, 14 August 1819, p. 60.
[49] D. Wale, *The Development and Influence of Reformatory Institutions for Juvenile Criminals in Nineteenth-Century Education* (Unpub. PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2019), pp. 296-306.

Schools' in Birmingham for 1829.[50] His teaching for the Bond Street Society for Mental Improvement had also become irregular.[51] Once his legal career was established, he never returned to running a school although he continued his interest in educational matters as a founder member of the Mechanics Institute Committee, discussed below.[52] Edmonds was committed to the principle of educational improvement, but he no longer wanted to practise it as a teacher.

Edmonds and his family suffered considerably as a result of his trial and period in jail, but a combination of support from family, church and fellow radicals, particularly the exertions of Patience Edmonds, enabled the family to survive. Edmonds may have acted hastily in giving up his school in June 1819 but would probably have lost patronage in the period after his arrest. His attempt to make a living from publishing and printing was not successful. He returned to keeping school, his only real choice if he was to support his family, and was able to make a modest success of the venture until another career beckoned.

Political and civic life 1822-1829

This section examines the degree to which, and how, Edmonds was able to recover his position in public life by the late 1820s. His political activities were necessarily circumscribed in that decade, both by the nationwide downturn in radical activity and by the fact that he was viewed with distrust by leading figures in the town, but he was able to remain active, albeit at a reduced level. If some figures were hostile, others

[50] Pigot's *Directory of Birmingham*, 1829.
[51] See Chapter Three, BA&C 405835 *Minute Book for the Use of the Bond Street Society for Mental Improvement*, pp. 22, 32-3, 36.
[52] His role in the campaign concerning the Free Grammar School in 1831 was primarily concerned with the question of local political control. See Chapter Seven.

gave their support. Thomas Attwood remembered later in life that he had befriended Edmonds and George Ragg after their release from jail.[53] Magistrate William Hamper remained cordial, as is illustrated by a letter sent to him by Edmonds which asked for support for widow Harriet Rollason at the Dispensary. 'I should regret that she has in me such an uninfluential moderator,' Edmonds wrote, 'if I did not well know that Mr Hamper is untinged by party feeling, and will not object to see the case even through my spectacles.'[54]

However, a few sympathetic members of the town establishment were not enough to protect Edmonds from the general hostility shown by the town's civic leaders when he was released from jail in late March 1822 and he was removed from office as a Guardian.[55] He did not, however, abandon his criticisms of the Guardians or his ambitions to be re-elected. Just before the next election at Easter 1825 he published another *Letter to the Payers of Levies* announcing his intention to stand, asserting his qualification as a £20 rate-payer and criticising the management of the Workhouse: 'Had I been Guardian the overseers would not have been luxuriously feeding at the Parish expense, while the paupers were eaten up with lice and ready to eat up each other for want of proper food.'[56] He also attacked the convention whereby the current Overseers sent round lists with 108 approved names: 'As well might a parcel of leeches recommend successors.'[57] On this occasion Edmonds'

[53] C. M. Wakefield, *Life of Thomas Attwood* (London: Harrison, 1885), p. 354.
[54] BA&C 125537, *Letters to William Hamper Volume Two,* Edmonds to Hamper, 17 July 1822. One of the few Edmonds manuscript items extant. The manuscript is annotated by Lydia Hamper: 'The above Geo Edmonds was a notorious leader of the Low Party in Birmingham.' Harriet Rollason was Patience Edmonds' sister. That Edmonds was acknowledging that his widowed sister-in-law needed this help is an indication that the family was unable to provide this.
[55] BA&C 60381 *Letter to the Payers of Levies of the Parish of Birmingham* (1825), p. 4. Edmonds wrote: 'The tricks of the junta prevailed and I was thrown out of office', but it is not clear whether he had already been removed or was prevented from standing in April 1822.
[56] Ibid., p. 4.
[57] Ibid., p. 10.

sharp rhetoric did him no good. The successful candidates received upwards of two hundred votes apiece while 'those recommended by Mr George Edmonds' had received a pitiful number: George Edmonds, 19; Mr T. Gibson, iron master, 17; George Ragg and Joseph Russell, 10 each; and Mr Thompson, shoe-maker 3.[58] This was perhaps the low-point of radical influence in civic matters in this period. Edmonds' determination, or obstinacy, was shown when, instead of abandoning his campaign against poor management of the Workhouse after this set-back, he pursued it with increased vigour. A committee of Guardians investigated an accusation he made about ill-treatment, found little evidence and complained bitterly about Edmonds' behaviour in 'beating up for witnesses'. However, they also concluded that the keeper of the insane ward was 'brutish' and should be replaced.[59] Edmonds may have overstated the problems and pursued his case with over-weaning zeal, but nevertheless uncovered a real case of poor management.[60]

These character traits of intransigence and perhaps over-confidence in his own position and abilities undoubtedly helped Edmonds survive this difficult period in his life but also brought difficulties. At some point, Edmonds appears to have lost the friendship of James Luckcock, the dissenting manufacturer with whom he had cooperated in various campaigns, especially the challenge to the Guardians.[61] Luckcock's *Sequel to Memoirs in Humble Life*, published in 1825, praised Edmonds' fearlessness and energy, but suggested that:

[58] *Birmingham Chronicle,* 31 March 1825.
[59] GP/B/2/1/2 *Guardian Minutes*, Meeting, 25 October 1825.
[60] The validity of the case against the governor and wife is discussed in C. Upton, *The Birmingham Parish Workhouse 1710-1840* (Hatfield, West Midlands Publications, 2019), pp. 126-8. Edmonds does not appear to have figured in the 1828 Guardian elections but, when the political climate had changed, he was elected again in 1831: *ABG,* 4 April 1831.
[61] See Chapter Four.

> The cause in which he engaged ensured him a host of enemies, and had he preserved his dignity of character, his intrepidity would have rendered him more than a match for them all; but failing in this, his triumph was transitory, and his friends, while they wanted of his support, were compelled to withdraw their own and thus his cause was doubly injured.[62]

This seems to be another case of Edmonds falling out with an ally, as he had with George Ragg, but no more is known about the circumstances. Eliezer Edwards, in his mostly favourable biography of Edmonds, remarks that Edmonds 'had a very genial disposition, and a charitable heart; but was impulsive, and was very strong in his resentments. He was what Dr Johnson might call "a good hater"'.[63]

Both this tendency for making enemies, but also a capacity for keeping friends and forming alliances, were shown over subsequent years. Edmonds faced continued prejudice from sections of the town's elite. He was part of the provisional committee for the Mechanics Institution, launched in 1825, alongside Whig and radical sympathisers such as Joseph Parkes, Edwin Hill and W. Hawkes Smith. This group was determined that the Committee should be a non-political body and reached out to other influential figures including Attwood, Spooner, W. Phipson and Francis Lloyd.[64] However, some Tories were hostile and pressure was put on Edmonds to withdraw.[65] In November 1825, Hawkes Smith felt the need to intervene and, in a letter to the *Birmingham Journal,* pointed out that 'Mr Edmonds is a person who…is known and respected by a large body of mechanics and artizans. The Institution is a

[62] J. Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs in Humble Life* (Birmingham, 1825).
[63] Edwards, 'George Edmonds'.
[64] BA&C 228835, *Address of the Provisional Committee of the Birmingham Mechanics Institution to the Artizans and Mechanics of Birmingham* (W.H. Smith, nd, [1825]**).**
[65] *BJ*, 12 November 1825.

Mechanics Institution; can it therefore be wondered that the mechanics choose as one of their representatives on the committee, a person so known and so respected?'[66] If Hawkes Smith's letters testified to Edmonds' continuing support amongst mechanics and artisans, the *Birmingham Journal,* at this point a proponent of high Tory principles, illustrated the continuing prejudice both against him and the idea of working-class participation in decision-making. Edmonds had been 'the foremost of those to foment the discontented and factious spirit which a few years ago raged among the working classes of this town'. If this was the man whom the working men had chosen, it showed they were not competent to have management of such an institution.[67] Eventually, Edmonds himself resigned from the Committee but continued his interest and defended Attwood's and Spooner's presence on the executive in November 1826.[68] At the AGM, in January 1827, Edmonds championed the election of Richard Spooner as chairman on the grounds that Spooner had 'journeyed with them through the wilderness', supporting the mechanics during the campaign against the Orders in Council.[69]

Edmonds' uncertain status continued in 1827 and 1828. He continued his collaboration with Attwood in 1827, helping to organise meetings of trade deputies to promote a petition for an enquiry into the causes of distress.[70] However, he was not in the forefront of the East Retford campaign of 1828, aimed at creating

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[66] *BJ*, 12 November 1825.
[67] *BJ*, 12 November 1825. A. Briggs 'Press and Public in Early Nineteenth-Century Birmingham', in *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs, Volume 1* (Brighton: Harvester, 1985), pp. 106-137, p. 111.
[68] *Birmingham Chronicle*, 6 July 1826; D. Moss, *Thomas Attwood: The Biography of a Radical* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), p. 132.
[69] *Birmingham Chronicle,* 11 January 1827. The alternative candidate was Thomas Hill, proposed by Reverend McDonnell, both of whom were more natural allies of Edmonds. This may be an example of Edmonds' loyalty to members of the elite who had sided with artisans, or of his search for sympathetic allies. Spooner, however, was on a different trajectory and stayed a Tory while others in his circle moved into the BPU.
[70] Moss, *Attwood*, pp. 135-7. For further details see Chapter Six.

parliamentary seats for Birmingham. Eliezer Edwards states that it was thought that Edmonds' presence 'would not aid the cause'.[71] One incident does show an increasing acceptance of Edmonds' presence in civic affairs and the role he played. A Town's Meeting in March 1828 discussed the Street Commissioners' proposals for town improvements. There was considerable opposition, a feeling that money ought not to be spent on projects when there was so much distress, and uproar when Joseph Russell proposed a resolution calling for the Street Commissioners to be elected. Edmonds appealed for calm discussion, and at one point there was a clamour for him to take the chair. This might reflect his developing status as a figure who could bring sides together and one looked to for leadership.[72]

By the late 1820s Edmonds had partially recovered his position in civic and political affairs, helped by his continuing stature amongst working-class representatives and individuals and aided by support from middle-class radicals of a variety of hues. He continued to exhibit his habit of falling out with collaborators, but also showed his capacity for retaining friendships. His participation in the limited political reform initiatives of the period, his relationship with members of the trades and cooperative movement, and his role in the campaign for Catholic Emancipation are discussed in Chapter Six.

A new career

This section discusses how Edmonds was able to make a new career in the law, examining the barriers that faced him, sources of support, and attitudes to status in Birmingham. Eliezer Edwards suggests Edmonds' interest in a legal career began

[71] Edwards, 'George Edmonds'. Sir Charles Tennyson brought forward a bill proposing the transfer of parliamentary seats from East Retford to Birmingham.
[72] *BJ,* 8 March 1828.

when he volunteered to assist a friend in the Court of Requests and 'found the self-imposed task much to his taste'.[73] Perhaps he was attracted to this course by his having experienced the law at first hand as a defendant. He would not be the last person to take up a career in the law after a period of incarceration. The Court of Requests acted as a local small claims court, enabling individuals to recover small debts without recourse to costly county justice.[74] Courts of Request were subject to increasing criticism by the mid-1820s, for instance, at the hands of Whig lawyer Joseph Parkes (1796-1865), but in the absence of an alternative continued to do steady business.[75] From 1827, Edmonds also appeared in the Magistrates' Court which was held weekly at the Public Office at Moor Street.[76]

Edmonds was able to attract a steady stream of business from those who would otherwise have found access to the courts difficult and his cases provide a fascinating glimpse into the everyday life of Birmingham's labouring, artisan and lower middle class. His first reported appearance in the Magistrates' Court was typical of the cases of petty theft that he took up, defending two individuals accused of receiving counterfeit coin.[77] Other cases involved servants accused of theft by their employers and he was sometimes able to get charges dropped, as in the case of a husband and wife accused of stealing linen from an employer.[78] Sometimes he was unable to prevent a committal to the Sessions, for instance, in the case of a

[73] Edwards, 'George Edmonds'.
[74] W. Hutton, *The Court of Requests* (Edinburgh: William and Robert Chambers, 1840 [1787]). Hutton was one of the commissioners and defended the Courts of Requests as fulfilling a necessary function.
[75] J. Parkes, *The State of the Court of Requests and the Public Office of Birmingham with Considerations on the Increase and Prosecution of Crime in the County of Warwick, Etc* (Birmingham, 1828); P. Salmon, 'Parkes, Joseph (1796-1865), election agent and reformer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 Sep. 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-21356 (accessed 8 Jun. 2020).
[76] Newspaper reports often referred to these sittings as the 'Police Court' or 'Police Office'.
[77] *BJ,* 8 September 1827.
[78] *BJ,* 17 April 1830.

woman accused of stealing glasses from a public house.[79] As Penelope Corfield has pointed out, unofficial representatives like Edmonds, often looked down on as 'pettyfoggers', played an important role in the days before professionalisation, 'For the poorly educated and especially for the illiterate, a pettyfogger could be a welcome intermediary to the world of written words.'[80] In an echo of Edmonds' political activity, he was representing the unrepresented.

However informal the system at the time, Edmonds still needed recognition by the courts. Eliezer Edwards suggests that Edmonds was able to survive in these local courts partly because of the absence of the 'strict etiquette' which later governed court appearances and partly because of his own abilities:

> His clear insight gave him the power of instantly possessing himself of the merits of the case, while his fluency of speech, his persuasive manner and his scholastic acquirements were great advantages. He soon obtained considerable influence among the respectable old gentlemen who at that time sat as judges in one court and magistrates in another. His intense love of fun, and his powerful irony, made these courts instead of dull and dreary places, lively and cheerful.[81]

This positive view of Edmonds' appearances might be exaggerated but some elements are borne out in court reports; his defences were often entertaining. In one instance he made a successful mitigation plea for two young men caught in a bull-baiting crowd, on the grounds that its illegality was not generally understood.[82] January 1831 saw him make an unsuccessful attempt to defend three gambling

[79] *BJ,* 31 October 1829.
[80] P. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 78.
[81] Edwards, 'George Edmonds'.
[82] *BJ,* 13 September 1828.

tricksters, suggesting there was no proof that money had changed hands. Magistrate William Hamper was not persuaded, and sent them for three months hard labour as rogues and vagabonds.[83] Edmonds could be found defending established street culture: the fishmongers of Dale End turned to him when the Street Commissioners tried to quieten their cries:

> It was too bad that (the) fish should grow stale for want of bawling perhaps because it might shake the nerves of the Commissioners. He was of the opinion that the Commissioners ought to be compelled to set the key to which his client should in future pitch his voice, and perhaps they might also select some pious tune to which they would adapt appropriate lines, the whole to be said or sung in the fish market in the most lady-like manner.[84]

Temperance preachers likewise found a defender in him when charged with obstructing the footpath. Perhaps George had his own father in mind when he suggested the magistrates recollect 'that many of the most respectable Dissenting ministers in the town had adopted that mode of preaching'. In this case he managed to get the fine sharply reduced.[85] He was equally prepared to defend publicans accused of conducting a lock-in, in one case exposing the constable who brought the case for having accepted the publican's hospitality.[86]

Edwards does find fault with aspects of Edmonds' approach:

[83] *BJ,* 15 January 1831.
[84] *BJ,* 17 December 1836.
[85] *BJ,* 9 July 1836. However, the zealous preacher declared he would not pay.
[86] *BJ,* 22 February 1834; 26 November 1836.

> He seemed always determined to win. True justice and fairness were not considered, so long as he could gain the day. Hence, when another advocate was opposed to him, the matter assumed ...the aspect of a professional tournament in which victory was to be gained, rather than that of a calm and impartial investigation in which the truth was to be ascertained and a just award made.[87]

Despite this tendency, court reports reveal that Edmonds was capable of taking a pragmatic approach when needed and seeking a practical outcome. Proceedings in the Magistrates' Court often allowed for accommodations and settlements, some of which might now be found unacceptable. He appeared for a servant girl who laid a complaint of assault against three young men who tried to break into the house she was guarding. Once the magistrates had established there had been no sexual assault, the case ended with the men being released but paying the young woman £11, compensation which she would not have received had the case gone to Sessions.[88]

While Edmonds was not primarily a campaigning lawyer, he did take up cases for individual workers against employers on occasion, including one against major iron founders Baldwin Brothers, successfully arguing that they had broken the law by paying in kind, contrary to the Truck Act.[89] He is not found on either side of the various cases that concerned combination, but did appear for individuals in cases of non-payment of wages, or when a sick club tried to avoid payment.[90] In the Warwickshire Michaelmas Sessions of 1834 he appeared on behalf of those

[87] Edwards, 'George Edmonds'.
[88] *BJ,* 6 December 1834.
[89] *BJ*, 1 February 1834.
[90] *BJ,* 23 November 1833, 7 March 1835.

imprisoned in Warwick Gaol for non-payment of fines for violations of the Stamp Act and was successful in getting them moved to the debtors' side of prison.[91]

Fig 5.1 The Magistrates Court

Birmingham magistrates tolerated and even enjoyed Edmonds' court appearances, a change from the hostility shown by some of the same magistrates at the time of his arrest and trial. The shift in attitude probably did not happen overnight, and was not universal, but confirms that one way or another, Edmonds was able to establish reasonable relations with some members of the town's elite. His position in the BPU from 1830 onwards and growing status in the town undoubtedly helped this

[91] *ABG,* 20 October 1834. Edmonds' defence of the Chartist George Julian Harney is discussed in Chapter Seven.

process.[92] There were, however, detractors and among these were members of the Birmingham Law Society (BLS). Edmonds' background might have offended the Law Society on one or more of several grounds: he had entered the field of legal representation in an unorthodox manner, he was the son of a Baptist minister with an artisan background, and he was a notorious radical and convicted felon. By examining the events more closely it may be possible to ascertain which of these objections apply.

The Birmingham Law Society was formed in 1818, one of the earliest provincial associations. There were 19 founding members, out of a possible 54 attorneys or solicitors practising in Birmingham at the time.[93] This suggests it was an elite group with controlled access to membership. Social and professional status rather than religious or political adherence seems to have been the criterion for membership. It included the Unitarian and Whig-leaning lawyers Joseph Parkes and William Redfern as well as lawyers such as the Whateleys who acted for the Tory-leaning county set.[94] Early minutes confirm that a central purpose of the society was to regularise access to the profession.[95] At this time, more attorneys or solicitors were needed to oil commercial wheels in the growing towns; existing attorneys were keen to control access and promote respectability by having an established path to professional status. This was part of a nation-wide pattern of professionalisation which culminated in the provision of examinations for articled clerks and a controlled 'Roll

[92] See Chapter Six.
[93] R. Follis, 'The Times They are A-Changin' ', *Birmingham Law Society Bulletin,* 2006; S. Hoban, *Our Legal Community: Two Hundred years of the Birmingham Law Society,* p. 12.
[94] Whateleys' was described as one of the largest provincial law firms; it acted for the Calthorpes, *The Solicitors' Journal and Reporter*, Volume 19 (Law Newspaper Company, 1875).
[95] *Records and Minutes*, 15 January 1821, 7 September 1822. The BLS supported colleagues in London and in Leeds who were objecting to unqualified attorneys.

of Attorneys'.[96] Davidoff and Hall note that the '(Birmingham Law) society particularly disapproved of the less orthodox methods of slipping into the law such as serving for a few years as a clerk to a registered attorney and then applying for admission to the Law Lists', and refer to the 'celebrated' case of George Edmonds.[97] The BLS's opposition to Edmonds was pursued fiercely, over a long period, and to a greater degree than can be explained by its defence of professional status.

The prejudice that existed against Edmonds was reflected in the pages of the *Monthly Argus*, the controversial periodical edited by Tory-radical Joseph Allday (1798-1861).[98] It made a series of attacks on Edmonds' pretensions. Allday was 'astonished' that the magistrates were allowing Edmonds to appear 'as though he were a regular bred attorney':

> To what motive are we to ascribe this perversion of all rule and regularity, we are at a loss to conjecture ... If professional gentlemen pay for their education, they certainly ought to be permitted to derive every lawful advantage from their practice, and not be superseded therein by intruders, totally unauthorised, and certainly unqualified, to occupy their stations.[99]

In Allday's opinion, Edmonds had offended not only because he was unqualified, but also because he was not a gentleman. In this class-conscious view, Edmonds had upset the natural order of society: the sons of poor Baptist ministers ought not to have the temerity to try to join a gentlemanly occupation. Even when Edmonds

[96] A. Harding, *A Social History of English Law*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966) pp. 287-290, 347-353; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 261-262.
[97] Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 262.
[98] This paragraph draws on the chapter by S. Thomas, '"One of the Most Extraordinary Publications Which Has Ever Appeared…": George Edmonds v. the Monthly Argus', in I. Cawood and L. Peters (eds.), *Print, Politics and the Provincial Press in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), pp. 57-80.
[99] *Birmingham Argus and Public Censor*, Vol. 2, No. 7, 1 February 1829, p. 103.

became an articled clerk, the *Argus* continued to refer to him as a 'poacher' on the legal profession.[100]

The BLS was alarmed by Edmonds' courtroom appearances in Birmingham and even more so when Edmonds attempted to practise in the Quarter Sessions in 1828. Lawyer Joseph Parkes, who had let Edmonds act in his name, was called to explain himself before a BLS meeting. He apologised, explained that he had acted in good faith, and was let off with a rap on the knuckles.[101] However, this was just the start of a long battle between Edmonds and the Society. Edmonds was in fact working hard to regularise his position, but his attempts to do so compounded his difficulties. He began acting as clerk to Mr Palmer of Coleshill, first from the Edmonds home in St Luke's Row and then from St Mary's Square, Whittall Street, to which he moved in 1831.[102] This relationship appeared unsatisfactory to some members of the BLS, although no action was taken after the first complaint.[103] At the start of 1833 the Society began to look for evidence of malpractice and the persistence with which it did so testifies to the hostility to Edmonds' ambitions. The Secretary was asked to discover if Palmer 'at any time failed to take out his certificate'.[104] When this came to nothing it appointed a sub-committee to further examine the connection between Edmonds and Palmer.[105] By November 1833, this sub-committee had collected several affidavits which suggested that Edmonds was, in reality, working for himself and using Palmer's name as a cover. Thomas Maunton, a tailor, had employed Edmonds and made him a suit of clothes in part payment. However, when Edmonds

[100] *Monthly Argus*, Vol. 2, August 1830, p. 94.
[101] BA&C MSS 2830, *Records and* Minutes, 26 March, 8 April and 23 August 1828.
[102] *Wrightson's Annual Directory of Birmingham 1828-9* (Birmingham, 1829); *Pigot's Commercial Directory of Birmingham* (Birmingham, March 1829); *Wrightson's,* 1831, 1833. Edmonds was still resident in St Luke's Row at the start of 1831 when Henry Hunt visited the town.
[103] *Records and Minutes,* 6 June 1829, 20 June 1829.
[104] *Records and Minutes,* 5 January 1833.
[105] *Records and Minutes,* 1 June 1833.

summonsed the tailor for a missing £5, he did so in the name of John Palmer, thus revealing the nature of the relationship. Further evidence suggested that Edmonds' paid Palmer £40 per annum for the use of his name.[106] At this point Edmonds felt obliged to insert a notice into *Aris's Gazette*:

> George Edmonds respectfully assures the public that the charge against him by certain malicious persons of illegally acting in the name of Mr John Palmer, Attorney-at-Law, is altogether founded in ignorance or perjury. GE is now under articles to the above gentleman and has merely and always acted as his clerk.[107]

This was to no avail. Edmonds and Palmer were on shaky ground. On 7 December 1833 the Society's committee decided to instruct barristers at the Court of King's Bench to move that John Palmer be struck off the Rolls. The committee now had extra evidence: the name John Palmer, solicitor was painted in large letters over the door of Edmonds' Whittall Street house, but George Edmonds was poor-rated at that address.[108] In January 1834 the case against John Palmer was brought before the Court of King's Bench. The investigation dragged on for a year and eventually the unfortunate Palmer was struck off. The judges concluded that Edmonds had profited directly from the arrangement and that Palmer was thus allowing an unqualified person to act as a solicitor.[109]

Despite this setback, most Birmingham magistrates continued to support Edmonds. Possibly their enjoyment of Edmonds' contributions to the court was now combined

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[106] *Records and Minutes*, 2 November 1833.
[107] *ABG,* 24 November 33.
[108] *Records and Minutes*, 7 December 1833.
[109] *ABG,* 20 January 34, 2 February 1835; *BJ*, 29 November 1834, 30 January 1835 and 7 February 1835; J. Richards, *The Legal Observer, Or, Journal of Jurisprudence, Volume 10* (London: J. Richards, 1835), pp. 84-5.

with a recognition of his status in Birmingham society after the success of the BPU's campaign for political reform.[110] On 21 February 1835 the *Birmingham Journal* reported that the magistrates had met and resolved that 'no objection would be offered to Mr E. practising in that court provided he could show ... that he attended as the representative of an attorney'. This Edmonds had done by becoming clerk to a Mr Edwin Wright.[111] However, not all were so tolerant. In June 1835 magistrate Lloyd Williams, having heard Edmonds express a difference with a decision he had made, objected to the latter's presence in court, saying that it was unendurable to be 'bearded by an attorney's clerk'.[112]

The *Birmingham Journal*, by now a radical-leaning newspaper, took Edmonds' side in this dispute, but its comments were designed to placate its professional readers. It made clear that it saw Edmonds' situation as a peculiar one which should not set a precedent. It noted that the magistrates had extended their indulgence to Edmonds over a period, that this had encouraged him to devote much of his life to the profession and was a 'tacit admission that his advancement would not be opposed'. It praised the magistrates such as Isaac Spooner and Mr Fenwick who showed forbearance and patience, knowing 'that they were gratifying the clients of Mr Edmonds, almost always of the poorer and more unfortunate classes – by letting them see that their advocate was not limited or interrupted in his exertions on their behalf'.[113] In this delicately worded editorial comment, the *Journal* managed to side with its radical ally Edmonds and flatter the magistrates, while letting the professional

[110] For more discussion of this point, see Chapter Six.
[111] *BJ*, 21 February 1835. On the same page a letter appeared from 'A Constant Reader' replying to 'mischievous' suggestions that Mr E. could not continue in his profession and announcing that Edmonds was now clerk to Mr Wright, Attorney-at-Law, No. 9 St Mary's Row.
[112] *BJ,* 27 June 1835.
[113] *BJ,* 4 July 1835.

lawyers know that it was against a free-for-all. It also, incidentally, confirms that Edmonds' cases were mostly concerned with the less well-off in the town.

When in 1835 Edmonds made the daring move to gain admission to King's Bench as a full attorney, the BLS once again gathered its evidence and entered a *caveat* against him as 'the party who shared most deeply in the criminality and profit of Mr Palmer's offence'.[114] Nevertheless, it was clear that Edmonds had some support amongst Birmingham's lawyers and from some unexpected quarters. In November 1835 the BLS committee received a memorial from Edmonds' old adversary Mr Spurrier, amongst others, stating support for him.[115] The Society was not swayed and Edmonds was unsuccessful in his appeal against the *caveat*.[116] He was officially articled to Edwin Wright from 1 November 1836, which enabled him to act in the newly-established County Court as well as in the local Magistrates' Court.[117] The unfortunate Palmer, meanwhile, tried unsuccessfully to be reinstated on the Roll of Attorneys.[118] Edmonds made another attempt to become an attorney in 1841 but the BLS once again entered a *caveat* against his admission.[119] It was not until 1847 that he was finally admitted to the Roll of Attorneys, aged 59.[120]

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[114] *Records and Minutes,* 3 October and 13 December 1834, 3 February 1835, 6 May 1835, 22 August 1835
[115] *Records and Minutes*, 4 November 1835.
[116] *Records and Minutes,* 18 January 1836, 6 February 1836**.**
[117] TNA, *Court of King's Bench: Plea Side: Affidavits of Due Execution of Articles of Clerkship, Series III*; Class: *KB 107*; Piece: *16,* Ancestry.com. *UK, Articles of Clerkship, 1756-1874* [database on-line].
[118] *ABG*, 8. February 1836, *BJ*, 11 June 1836. Palmer's mistake was to try to correct a statement he had made previously. Whereas in 1835 he had sworn that Edmonds had merely acted as his paid attorney's clerk, receiving £150 a year, he now suggested that Edmonds had given him a payment in return for receipt of fees and that he had acquiesced in this in an 'hour of difficulty and folly'. Whichever account is true, the change of story did him no good.
[119] J. Richards, *The Legal Observer, Or, Journal of Jurisprudence, Volume 22, May-October 1841* (London: Edmond Spettigue), p. 107; *Records and Minutes,* Report to the AGM, October 1842, p. 458.
[120] Discussed in Chapter Ten. His appointment as Clerk of the Peace is discussed in Chapter Seven.

The question of Edmonds' professional position even became a topic at political events. Edmonds was the Chair of the Grand Dinner of the Non-Electors on 1 February 1836 at a point when he was having to visit the court in London in connection with his case.[121] He was shown warm support by both fellow speakers and the audience. Fellow reformer Benjamin Hadley referred to the fact that Edmonds, long a victim of persecution, now had to defend himself at the King's Bench. All those present, he declared, had faith in Edmonds' clean hands.[122] In his own speech, thanking the audience for their support, Edmonds referred, as usual, to his earlier campaigns and imprisonment, but added:

> I suffered less from the consequences of that imprisonment than I do at the present moment from persecution now carrying on against me (Shame)… I was five years studying to be qualified for an honourable profession and afterwards vexatiously harassed to deprive me of the benefit of it…. They may throw barriers in my progress but I shall get into that profession to which I am legally and justly entitled...[123]

There are interesting party-political aspects to this affair. Benjamin Hadley was careful to describe the attacks on Edmonds as 'Tory persecution'. Perhaps this was to avoid embarrassing the prominent Whigs in the Birmingham Law Society, including members of the Redfern family, who were seated, together with two Rylands, on the top table at the dinner on 1 February![124] At least one source seems to have been struck by the irony. The *Birmingham Advertis*er suggested that it was

[121] BA&C 60752 *Report of the Proceedings of the Grand Dinner of the Non-Electors to the Borough members T. Attwood and J. Scholefield esqs. on Monday February 1 1836* (Birmingham: Joseph Webb, 1836).
[122] *Report of the Proceedings, February 1 1836*; *BJ,* 6 February 1836.
[123] *BJ,* 6 February 1836.
[124] *BJ,* 6 February 1836.

Whig lawyers who were foremost in driving the proceedings instituted by the Law Society. Not so, stated the *Journal* – those concerned had been merely acting in their secretarial capacity.[125] This last comment probably referred to the activity of Arthur Ryland, a young solicitor who was acting as secretary of the BLS. It may well be true that Ryland was merely fulfilling his appointed role in drawing up reports in connection with the Edmonds affair, but his career provides an interesting contrast to that of Edmonds. Born in 1807 to a branch of the Unitarian Ryland family, he was articled in 1823 to a Law Society member.[126] By 1830 he was practising as an attorney, based in New Street.[127] There could be no better illustration of the different paths faced by Edmonds, the radical son of a Baptist minister from an artisan background, and Ryland, born into the Unitarian town elite.[128]

What were the motives of the Birmingham Law Society in opposing Edmonds' accession to the profession so strenuously? Its behaviour was certainly part of the drive for professionalisation. Edmonds' radical politics may have been an additional factor when the question first emerged in the late 1820s, but by the 1830s, political shifts in the town meant that this was unlikely to be the driving motive. Rather, Edmonds' unorthodox route into the profession, his lowly origins, and his behaviour as an attorney's clerk continued to annoy the Society. A more sympathetic and less snobbish body might have acknowledged that had Edmonds experienced the advantages of a young Arthur Ryland, he could have avoided dubious practices. The

[125] *BJ*, 13 February 1836.
[126] *Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths surrendered to the Non-Parochial Registers Commissions of 1837 and 1857*; Class Number: *RG 4*; Piece Number: *4661_2,* Birth of Arthur Ryland*;* TNA, *Court of King's Bench: Plea Side: Affidavits of Due Execution of Articles of Clerkship,* Series II; Class: KB 106; Piece: 8.
[127] *Wrightson's Triennial Directory of Birmingham,* 1830.
[128] For the Rylands see R. Watts, 'Joseph Priestley and his Influence on Education in Birmingham', in M. Dick (ed.), *Joseph Priestley and Birmingham* (Studley: Brewin Books, 2005), p. 55.

whole affair is a reminder that Birmingham, for all its reputation as a town where individuals could rise in the ranks, was still riven by class.

Edmonds and his family faced considerable difficulties during and after his period in prison. He was supported by fellow radicals, by fellow Baptists, by supporters of his school and by sympathetic individuals such as Attwood and Hamper. This, together with his own efforts and those of his wife Patience, enabled the family to recover its financial position by the mid-1820s, although that remained precarious. Patience Edmonds' contributions in the home and business were essential.

Edmonds encountered a series of barriers in pursuing his ambition of working in the law. He found a role representing the less well-off in the town. His natural talent and education helped him to gain the ear of magistrates. However, to rise further in the profession, which was formalising its procedures, meant gaining experience and education. This he was able to do but he then met with prejudice and outright opposition from the upper middle-class gentlemen who made up the leadership of the Birmingham Law Society. This illustrates the very considerable class divide that existed in the town at that period and the limitations to movement between different status groups.

Edmonds also encountered opposition in his attempt to regain a position in civic and political life. However, his own abilities, together with a gradual shift in attitudes as the 1820s advanced, allowed his voice to be heard in several campaigns and meetings. His leadership position amongst radical mechanics and artisans, while alarming some, lent him importance with others, both Whig and Tory. This will be a major theme of the next chapter.

Chapter Six

EDMONDS, THE BIRMINGHAM POLITICAL UNION AND THE RADICAL CULTURE OF BIRMINGHAM (1823-33)

This chapter examines Edmonds' role in the Birmingham Political Union (BPU) and his place in the wider radical culture and ferment of political ideas that accompanied the campaign for the 1832 Reform Act. The BPU, led by Thomas Attwood, was launched in January 1830 and elected a Political Council which guided its activity and decided its political positions. Its focus was on achieving a parliamentary majority for reform and pressurising the Whig government to pass a Reform Bill. This was finally achieved in May 1832.

Edmonds was on the Political Council of the BPU from its inception. Attwood's biographer, David Moss, considers that Edmonds played a crucial role in delivering support for Attwood amongst politically aware artisans and leading radicals and in managing events. Carlos Flick suggests: 'Without Edmonds's assistance, Attwood probably could not have won and retained the support of workers in the early months of the organisation.'[1] One aim of the chapter is to evaluate these assessments and explore the extent and nature of Edmonds' contributions to the BPU. Linked to this is the importance of Edmonds' support for the compromise that lay at the heart of the Union. The programme of popular radicalism included universal male, or at least household, suffrage but Attwood and his fellow currency reformers were focused on gaining town representation and a more limited extension of the franchise. Clive Behagg describes Edmonds' move to support the more restricted suffrage offered by

[1] C. Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union and the Movements for Reform in Britain 1830-39* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1978), p. 25; D. Moss, *Thomas Attwood: the Biography of a Radical* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1990), pp. 132, 157-8, 161.

the Whig Reform Bills as originating in his analysis of the failure of the 1815-20 agitation, while Carlos Flick and David Moss both suggest that Edmonds and the Radicals continued to hold their original position but compromised in order to preserve unity.[2] The chapter explores the development of Edmonds' position and the extent to which it shifted according to political circumstances. It examines his political ideas in relation to the wider culture of radicalism and his views on the specific programme of the BPU, in the first and second sections respectively.

In examining Edmonds' role, the chapter also illuminates established debates surrounding the BPU. The story is part of the 'Birmingham Myth' of class cohesion, unity of purpose and Birmingham's influence on national politics, but this view is contested.[3] Carlos Flick and Nancy LoPatin suggest that the Union's influence was less than it claimed; in response, Roger Ward points out that recent histories of the 1830-32 movement for reform have acknowledged the significance of the provincial campaign and Birmingham's role in it.[4] The view of the BPU as a vessel of class cooperation has been challenged by Clive Behagg who argues that Attwood came under intense pressure from the rank-and-file of the BPU.[5] In considering Edmonds' role, the chapter explores the extent of that pressure.

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[2] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 39-40; C. Behagg, *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 163 and note, p. 255; Moss, *Thomas Attwood*, pp. 171-2.

[3]. A Briggs, 'The Background of the Parliamentary Reform Movement in Three English Cities, 1830-32' [1948]; in *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs Volume One* (Brighton: Harvester, 1985), pp. 180-213 Behagg, *Politics and Production,* pp. 12-19; R. Ward, *City State and Nation: Birmingham's Political History 1830-32* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2005), pp. 31-32.

[4] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union,* pp. 11-14; N. LoPatin, *Political Unions, Popular Politics and the Great Reform Act of 1832* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 2-5; E. Pearce, *Reform: the Fight for the 1832 Reform Act* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003), pp. 4-7; A. Fraser, *Perilous Question: the Drama of the Great Reform Bill 1832* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2013), pp. 276-278 ; R. Ward, 'Birmingham: a Political Profile, 1700-1940', in eds. C. Chinn and M. Dick, *Birmingham: the Workshop of the World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), pp. 165-166.

[5] C. Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 166-178.

This was a fertile time for alternative ideas of social and economic improvement which co-existed alongside the dominant movement for political reform. Edmonds' interests included Catholic Emancipation, the campaign against newspaper stamp duty and the abolition of slavery. The chapter considers how the ferment of ideas might have impacted on him. The biographical approach adopted, focusing on how a significant individual navigated the choppy waters of political and social life, provides a holistic view of the radical culture of the time.

Edmonds did not have his own press after 1820, so his opinions are gleaned from the record of his speeches, carried in the *Reports* made of the mass events and in the sympathetic *Birmingham Journal*.[6] Alternative voices come from the radical press, including the locally produced *Pioneer* and *Midland Representative and Cooperative Herald* as well as the national press, notably the *Poor Man's Guardian*, which provide a critique of the BPU's policy of supporting the Whig government's Reform Bills. The Tory-supporting *Monthly Argus*, edited by Joseph Allday, provides a satirical and sceptical voice. Eliezer Edwards' biographical sketch of Edmonds continues its sympathetic account from a liberal perspective. Several contemporary autobiographical accounts, including those of Frederick Hill, co-operator George Holyoake and the soldier, Alexander Somerville, are used.[7] Other plebeian voices are few, which means that it is sometimes necessary to infer popular feeling, including differences over the BPU's direction, from press reports. Women's voices are hard to find, although the records of the Female Society for the Relief of Negro

[6] The *Reports* were mostly edited by Joseph Parkes to ensure that published comments did not stray into unlawfulness (MS note by Joseph Parkes in BA&C, Birmingham Institutions, Vol.2, Pt 1. Political Union).

[7] A. Somerville, *The Autobiography of a Working Man* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967 [1848]), pp. 155-168; E. Edwards, 'George Edmonds', *Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men* (Birmingham, 1877); F. and C. Hill, *An Autobiography of Fifty years in Times of Reform*, *edited with additions by his daughter Constance Hill* (London: Bentley, 1893), pp. 77-100; G. Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1906), pp. 19-37.

Slaves and the press of the Owenite movement reflect an increase in active female campaigning.[8]

This chapter begins by exploring Edmonds' relationship to radical ideas and culture in this period followed by a section examining Edmonds' participation in the BPU. The final section considers Edmonds' position in town life, asking whether his participation in the reform campaign resolved personal difficulties, including prejudice against him in civic life, financial pressures and barriers in his career.

Edmonds and the radical ideas and culture of Birmingham 1823-33

When Edmonds embarked on the tumultuous period of activity in the BPU, he brought with him a range of political ideas and influences, a commitment to popular, constitutional radicalism and a reputation as a radical leader. This section considers how his beliefs were further affected by the strands of thought that developed in Birmingham in the late 1820s and early 1830s. A wide range of ideas developed nationally and locally about how to improve economic and social conditions, widen participation in civic affairs and extend civil rights. This section considers how Edmonds related to these ideas and campaigns, beginning with an assessment of his attitude to the political reform movement in the early 1820s.

The radical reform movement was constrained in the early 1820s by the imposition of the Six Acts and arrests of activists. Michael Brock notes that the *Black Dwarf* ceased publication in 1824 and no petitions for reform were presented to Parliament between 1824 and 1829, but his assessment that 'during the 1820s both sides in the

[8] BA&C MS 3173, Ladies' Negro's Friend Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves, Minutes and Reports, 1826-1889 (Known as the 'Female Society'); *The Pioneer*, Nos 1-44, September 1833-July 1834; E.W. Hampton, *Early Cooperation in Birmingham and District* (Birmingham: Birmingham Cooperative Society, 1928).

Reform struggle gave up hope', is too sweeping.[9] There were other forms of protest and engagement: the trade union upsurge in 1824-5 linked to the partial lifting of the Combination Acts, the spread of cooperative ideas, the growth of educational schemes such as the Mechanics' Institutes and, in Birmingham, the female-led revival of the anti-slavery movement.

Edmonds assessed the prospects for radical reform in speeches made at the celebratory dinners for T.J. Wooler and Charles Maddocks on their release from jail in 1822, and at a dinner for Henry Hunt in 1823.[10] He acknowledged the challenges reformers faced: 'The people of England do not make those exertions which I should be glad if they were to make.'[11] This speech also revealed his thinking about the purpose of reform: the interests of radical reformers went beyond town or even country but extended to 'the welfare and happiness of all mankind without any distinction':

> Every Government that has not this in view is unworthy of our support; Religion is of no avail, unless it effects this object – nay Heaven itself is only valuable because it promotes the happiness of us conscious beings (Cheers). This therefore being the reward of virtue, we have God himself to sanction our cause…[12]

This combined a Benthamite view of obtaining the happiness of the majority with radical internationalism; it has echoes of Tom Paine's view that 'My country is the world, and my religion is to do good.'[13] Edmonds' thinking had gone beyond

[9] M. Brock, *The Great Reform Act* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p.15.
[10] See Chapter Four.
[11] BA&C 63207, *Report of the Proceedings of the Public Dinner given in honour of Mr Wooler on his liberation from Warwick Gaol,* pp. 16-17. The speech was circumscribed by the Six Acts.
[12] Ibid.
[13] T. Paine, *Rights of Man* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1996[1791]), p. 181.

Christian universalism to a form of pragmatic humanism, although he had not abandoned his faith. At the less well-attended dinner for Hunt on 14 July 1823, Edmonds made a spirited defence of the French Revolution and called for civil liberties world-wide but revealed his disappointment at the lack of middle-class support.[14] It was left to Hunt to warn the assembly that they should not rely on such allies. Hunt was repeating the sentiment that Edmonds himself had expressed in 1819, of the necessity for rank-and-file radicals to stand on their own feet.[15] Edmonds was now less sanguine.

The first sign of a campaign for political reform involving leading figures in the town came in 1827 when a coalition was formed to seek the transference of a seat from East Retford to Birmingham. Edmonds had no leading role but 'worked energetically' for the cause.[16] A meeting held in support of Tennyson's Bill was so large it had to be adjourned from the Public Office to Beardsworth's Repository, a large building near the Bull Ring, normally used for showing and selling horses.[17] Edmonds spoke in favour of the measure, remarking that he was content with piece-by-piece reform if that was the approach preferred by the government and 'he had sufficient experience to know that mankind were not in that state to be reconciled by theories'. He could not resist observing, however, that: 'Had they always witnessed such a devotion to the public interest … there would not have been any appearance of

[14] *Statesman*, 16 July 1823.
[15] *ABG*, 21 July 1823; *Statesman*, 16 July 1823; *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder*, 14 August 1819 and see Chapter Four. Edmonds shared the carriage with Hunt on the way into town. Hunt referred to the fact that he knew many of the Birmingham radicals by reputation, because of the persecution and imprisonment they had suffered but that only Edmonds was personally known to him prior to this visit.
[16] Edwards, 'George Edmonds'*;* Moss, *Thomas Attwood*, pp. 138-139. See also Chapter Five; Edmonds was still regarded with suspicion by middle-class reformers in 1827.
[17] J. Langford, *A Century of Birmingham Life* Vol. 2, (Birmingham: E.C. Osborne, 1868), pp. 138-9; T. Harman and W. Showell, *Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1885), pp. 35-36 and 496. Beardsworth's became the preferred venue for large meetings until the Town Hall was opened. See Map Two.

discord between the higher and lower classes of this town.'[18] This expressed willingness to seek alliances, combined with gentle or sharp digs at middle-class latecomers to the cause, became a pattern in Edmonds' speeches, reflecting his views on the strategic need for coalitions with a confidence born either from his leadership of the popular radical movement, or his own self-belief.

Edmonds and Attwood, who had worked together in 1817 on the 'Distressed Artisans' petition and retained their friendship, strengthened their cooperation from the mid-1820s.[19] Attwood had declined an invitation to the dinner for T. J. Wooler, sending a letter saying that while he 'was a convert to Mr Wooler's opinions with respect to the representation of the people', he sought a more limited reform programme.[20] His main concern remained, as it always was, the question of currency reform. However, by 1827, he became convinced that he needed wider support for his ideas and approached Edmonds to help call a meeting 'of all the trades in Birmingham'. This meeting agreed a petition to the Commons on the poor state of trade but did not endorse Attwood's currency theories.[21]

Edmonds had earlier recognised the necessity of a readily available circulating medium but was critical of the Bank of England's control of it.[22] By the late 1820s he was willing to cooperate with Attwood on political reform, but without endorsing Attwood's currency views. Attwood's theories were one of several ideas discussed by radical reformers interested in overcoming the trade cycle; for example, the Owenite William Pare (1805-1873) saw Attwood's currency reform schemes as part

[18] *BJ*, 27 June 1827.
[19] Moss, *Thomas Attwood*, pp. 78, 132.
[20] *Report of the Public Dinner…for Mr Wooler*, p. 4. Neither did he appear at the dinner for Hunt in 1823.
[21] *BJ,* 17 and 24 March 1827; Moss, *Thomas Attwood*, pp. 135-6. The date in Moss's reference, 1824, is inaccurate; it is clear in his text that the events occurred in 1827.
[22] *Saturday's Register*, 22 January 1820, pp. 14-21.

of a transition to a cooperative system.[23] Edmonds usually mentioned Attwood's theories as something to be considered sympathetically, but not as the centre of the reform campaign. In July 1832, for example, he acknowledged that the lack of circulating currency was a problem in the provinces but said he was 'not one of those who thought that the whole of their wrongs and miseries could be attributed to the currency'.[24] This was perhaps the reason why William Cobbett asked for Edmonds to chair the debate between himself and Attwood at the end of August 1832.[25]

Edmonds had continuing connections with trade representatives, as illustrated by the fact that Attwood had asked for his help in organising the 1827 meeting of trades. As a schoolteacher then lawyer, Edmonds was not a member of a trade organisation but his collaboration with artisans, mechanics and workers in friendly societies or trades unions persisted throughout his activity in the political reform movement. Trade societies had a continuous, if restricted, presence in Birmingham from the late eighteenth century, friendly societies often having a dual purpose of providing welfare and controlling the trade. [26] A flurry of trade union activity greeted the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824.[27] The print, club and discussion culture of Birmingham included sites of artisan engagement such as trade clubs, early co-operative activity and the unstamped press.[28] Connections between the trades and

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[23] R. Garnett, *William Pare (1805-1873): Co-operator and Social Reformer* (Loughborough: Cooperative Union Ltd, 1973), p. 13; W. Hewins, and M. Lee, 'Pare, William (1805-1873), co-operative movement activist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-21262 (accessed 12 July 2020).
[24] BA&C 442207*, Report of the Proceedings of the Third Annual General Meeting of the Birmingham Political Union held at Newhall Hill on Monday July 30th 1832* (Birmingham, 1832), p. 7. He took the same approach when the BPU was revived in 1837; *BJ*, 24 June 1837.
[25] *BJ,* 1 September 1832; *Political Register*, Vol 77, No 10, September 1832, pp. 578-624.
[26] C. Behagg, 'Custom, Class and Change: the Trade Societies of Birmingham', *Social History,* Vol. 4, No. 3 (October 1979), pp. 455-480; J. Nicholas, *Trade Clubs and Societies in Birmingham 1790-1830* (Unpub. BA Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1949).
[27] Behagg, 'Custom, Class and Change', p. 461.
[28] A. Briggs, 'Press and Public in Early Nineteenth-Century Birmingham'[1949], in A. Briggs, *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs, Volume 1* (Brighton: Harvester, 1985), 106-137; James Guest, 'A

the reform movements strengthened during the main campaigning period of the BPU, 1830-32, but so did independent cross-sectional organisations with the formation of a United Trades Committee, chaired by Henry Watson.[29] By the time the trades organisations celebrated the passing of the Reform Act with a grand parade, many occupations were represented by their banners.[30] These were once again prominent in the Newhall Hill meeting of May 1833 which, in the face of further distress and in protest at the Irish Coercion Bill, called for the dismissal of the Whig Government. The speakers arrived, led by the banners of the BPU 'followed by a long procession of the beautiful flags and newly painted flags and banners of the various trades'.[31] These symbols articulated working-class, or at least trade, distinctiveness and consciousness of identity.

Edmonds was a conduit between workers' representatives and the Political Council. For example, during the harsh winter of 1831-2, Dudley colliers needed support for those who had been imprisoned after a recent strike and approached the BPU's Political Council. A Mr Hardcastle told the Council that Edmonds had already promised to defend as many as he could and had contributed to the subscription.[32] Edmonds' relationship with working-class organisers continued, not without

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Free Press', inserted as pp. 493- 507 into W. Hutton, *An History of Birmingham with considerable additions,* 6th edition, copy held at BA&C (Birmingham: J. Guest, 1860).

[29] For Henry Watson, see Appendix C.

[30] *ABG,* 20 August 32; *BJ,* 25 August 1832; G.D.H. Cole, *Attempts at a General Union: a Study in British Trade Union History 1818-1834* (London: Macmillan, 1953), pp. 22, 33. Amongst the celebratory dinners held after the August parade was one put on by the United Committee for the benefit of the sand-wheelers.

[31] BA&C 670744, *Report of the proceedings of the Great Public Meeting of the inhabitants of Birmingham and its neighbourhood held at Newhall Hill on Monday May 20th 1833 convened by the Council of the Political Union for the purpose of petitioning His Majesty to dismiss his ministers* (Birmingham, 1833).

[32] *Midland Representative*, 31 December 1831. Messrs Palmer and Edmonds were among those thanked for their efforts at a meeting in Dudley on 12 January 1832, DALHS, PO/129, *Meeting of the Inhabitants of Dudley and its Vicinity, January 12th 1831* (the document itself is incorrectly dated, the events mentioned make clear this was January 1832).

difficulties, when disappointment with the Reform Act grew. The United Trades Committee, together with the newly formed Committee of Non-Electors and the Committee of Unemployed Artisans, formed a short-lived Midland Union of the Working Classes. On 29 October 1832, a 5,000-strong meeting, attended by Henry Hetherington (1792–1849) and chaired by Arthur Wade (1787-1845), discussed the need for working men to have their own organisation.[33] There is no report of Edmonds at that meeting, although his collaborators William Pare and Timothy Massey were present.[34] Nevertheless, he retained the confidence of leaders of the trades and unemployed, shown by his being asked to chair a joint meeting of the Midland Union and the Committee of Non-Electors, held to determine an attitude to be taken to the coming election. He made clear, however, that he regretted the formation of a separate Union.[35] His commitment was to the class cooperation embodied in the Political Union.

From the late 1820s onwards, cooperative and Owenite ideas became more influential amongst a minority of radicals and some trade unionists and the Birmingham Cooperative Society was founded in 1828.[36] Edmonds was a friend of the co-operator William Pare. In an affectionate speech at the farewell dinner to Pare in 1842, Edmonds remembered that the two had attended the same church for many

[33] *BJ,* 27 October 1832, 3 Nov 1832; J. Wiener, 'Hetherington, Henry (1792–1849), publisher and journalist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-13136 (accessed 12 July 2020); M. Chase, 'Wade, Arthur Savage (bap. 1787, d. 1845), Chartist and Church of England clergyman', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-75295 (accessed 12 July 2020); T. H Lloyd, 'Dr Wade and the Working Class', *Midland History*, Vol. 2, No. 2. Autumn 1973, pp. 61-83; Behagg, *Politics and Production*, p. 180. The meeting revealed continuing tensions between the Attwood leadership and working-class leaders, but there was no formal split.

[34] Timothy Massey, a carpenter and reformer. See Appendix C.

[35] *ABG,* 10 December 32; *BJ*, 15 December 32.

[36] BA&C 72237, *An Address delivered at the opening of the Birmingham Cooperative Society, November 17th, 1828 by a member* (Birmingham, nd [1828]).

years before Pare became a rationalist: 'If Mr Pare had come to erroneous opinions on religious matters there could be no doubt that he adopted them from conscientious conviction.' [37] They shared a commitment to radical reform and the campaign against church rates. Both were founding members of the BPU, members of the Political Council and on its radical wing.[38] Edmonds on occasion indicated support for cooperative ideas, reflecting the cross-fertilisation that existed between radical campaigns.[39]

Robert Owen (1771-1858) visited Birmingham in the Autumn of 1832, promoting the idea of an Equitable Labour Exchange, a cooperative scheme designed to allow the exchange of goods produced by those involved, and he attended a meeting of the Political Council of the BPU.[40] The relationship between the BPU leadership and the Birmingham Labour Exchange has been differently interpreted. Eric Hopkins suggests that 'something like altruism' can be found in the participation of BPU Council members in the initial Exchange committee. Behagg, by contrast, suggests that little support was forthcoming from the middle class and points to Attwood's declining to attend the initial public meeting.[41] Most of Attwood's circle remained wedded to currency reform, rather than to an alternative system of production and

[37] R. Garnett, *William Pare (1805-1873): Co-operator and Social Reformer*, Cooperative College Papers No. 16 (Loughborough: Cooperative Union Ltd, 1973), p.25. This dinner was held after Pare had been forced out of his position as Registrar because of his atheistic views.
[38] BA&C, 352872, Hampton, *Early Cooperation in Birmingham* p. 24; Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union,* pp. 25-26; Garnett, *William Pare*, p. 26; Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, p. 536.
[39] *Midland Representative*, 17 September 1831. Edmonds had been expected to chair a 'meeting of the Working Classes' on the topic of Cooperation but was delayed. O'Brien took the Chair, commenting that Edmonds could have given an able exposition of the principles had he been there.
[40] Hampton, *Early Cooperation in Birmingham,* p. 37; *The Birmingham Labour Exchange Gazette,* January-February 1833 explained the scheme, listing carpenters, stone masons, gunmakers, jewellers, tailors, shoemakers, bricklayers, platers, brassfounders, locksmiths and silk hatters as having had meetings to discuss the scheme by the start of February 1833; G. Claeys, 'Owen, Robert (1771-1858), socialist and philanthropist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-21027 (accessed 12 July 2020).
[41] Behagg, *Politics and Production*, p. 80; E. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town: Birmingham and the Industrial Revolution* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998 revised edition), pp. 145-6.

exchange. However, G.F. Muntz (1794–1857) and Edmonds attended the launch meeting of the Labour Exchange on 26 November 1832 while Spooner and Attwood acted as bankers to the Exchange when it was finally opened in July 1833.[42] Overall, this hints that some BPU leaders were prepared to lend their support; Muntz was no friend of trade unions so this suggests the Exchange was seen as a respectable way of sustaining trade. Edmonds, if not central to the project, appears to have taken it seriously and at the launch meeting said that he agreed that the existing system of exchange was defective, producing gluts and crises. He had studied Owen's proposals carefully and thought that the proposed Labour Exchange might overcome these crises and ensure that wealth could be enjoyed by all.[43] In March 1833, he spoke again at a meeting addressed by Hawkes Smith, Hetherington and Pare.[44] The Birmingham Equitable Labour Exchange lasted until the middle of 1834.[45] There is no sign of any further involvement by Edmonds in Owenite campaigning in Birmingham, or in its press.[46] Edmonds was involved in that part of Owenism that suggested an alternative to social inequality but not in the phase of general trade unionism that followed, although he expressed his outrage at the Whig government's transportation of the Dorchester labourers.[47] Owenite ideas continued to be

[42] Behagg, *Politics and Production*, p. 80; Hopkins, *Rise of the Manufacturing Town*, pp. 145-6; S. Timmins and M. Lee, 'Muntz, George Frederick (1794-1857), political reformer and industrialist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-19551 (accessed 12 July 2020). Hampton names Muntz, Pare, Rabone, Hawkes Smith and the Owenite house painter James Morrison as the main individuals associated with the Exchange: Hampton, *Early Cooperation in Birmingham,* pp. 37 and 43.
[43] *BJ,* 1 December 32. Edmonds sees the advantages as being in the realm of exchange rather than production.
[44] *ABG,* 25 March 1833.
[45] Hampton, *Early Cooperation in Birmingham,* p. 46. On closure, it discharged its debts, repaid the original share capital and gave the surplus of £8, 3s and 1/2d to the General Hospital.
[46] James Morrison produced the *Pioneer* from September 1833 to July 1834, see Appendix C. BA&C 252178, H. B. Williams, *Syndicalism: a History of the Movement in Birmingham*; *The Pioneer*, Nos 1-44, September 1833-July 1834; C. Behagg, 'Custom, class and change: the trade societies of Birmingham', *Social History,* Vol. 4, No. 3 (October 1979), pp. 455-480, 473.
[47] BA&C 60749, *Great meeting in support of the Corporation Reform held in the Town Hall in Birmingham on Tuesday 18th August 1835* (Birmingham: Joseph Webb, 1835), p.7. The Owenite

influential among radical leaders, but were frequently combined with the programme of popular radicalism rather than replacing it. For example, when unemployed organiser Thomas Baker referred to the 'murderous system of competition' in 1837, he focused on the need for government action to overcome it.[48]

During the Reform Bill agitation of 1830-32, the coalition politics of the BPU dominated the political scene in Birmingham but there were always critical voices: supporters of the programme of popular radicalism continued to press for universal male suffrage and resisted attempts to water down their aims. Henry Hunt was influential, producing letters or speeches which criticised the compromises of the BPU.[49] The national radical press was widely distributed; for example, Henry Hetherington's *The Poor Man's Guardian*, launched in July 1831, was sold in Birmingham by James Guest.[50] Hetherington, who was associated with the National Union of the Working Classes, argued for 'a more equal distribution of property …(which) could only be brought about by a House of Commons elected by the people'.[51] This was a position close to Edmonds' views but Hetherington's insistence on universal suffrage proved an embarrassment when the latter visited Birmingham in July 1831. The Political Council, including Edmonds, declared that while they supported universal suffrage in principle, they were also committed to the Reform Bill.[52] This incident illustrated Edmonds' dilemma. He was sympathetic to ideas which promised better sharing of wealth and human happiness, and considered

unions, the Operative Builder's Union and Grand National Consolidated Union, were active 1833-4: see H. B. Williams, *Syndicalism: a History of the Movement in Birmingham.*

[48] *BJ*, 7 October 1837.

[49] For example, in May 1830 to urge the Union not to support the Marquis of Blandford Bill, see next section.

[50] G. Barnsby, *Birmingham Working People* (Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services, 1989), p. 44**.**

[51] *PMG,* No. 4, 30 July 1831; *Coventry Herald,* 29 July 1831.

[52] *PMG,* No. 4, 30 July 1831; *BJ,* 30 July 1831.

parliamentary reform essential, but believed that a compromise was needed to achieve this.

Edmonds was probably politically closest to the *Midland Representative and Birmingham Herald*, which was launched in April 1831 and edited by James Bronterre O'Brien (1804–1864).[53] It had 3,000 shareholders, suggesting that it was a popular initiative. James Powell, a local co-operator, was secretary and Pare and James Guest were frequent advertisers.[54] The paper pursued an editorial policy in favour of Parliamentary Reform and other radical causes.[55] O'Brien wrote that he was not 'warm' for the Bill but prepared to labour for it.[56] The paper carried the motto: 'The Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number for the Greatest Length of Time'. Asa Briggs notes: 'Although this Benthamite slogan appears at first sight as a most innocuous general formula, it was indeed the battle-cry for some of the more extreme among the members of the Political Union.'[57] This is perhaps misleading; the slogan was certainly used by the radical wing on the Political Council, Edmonds included, but it could also be used to defend a pragmatic approach.[58] An alternative view is that the *Midland Representative* was 'issued to counter unstamped sheets and the radical claims made by Hunt'.[59] This too is an exaggeration: it would be more accurate to say that the paper was a critical friend of the reform movement, as

[53] M. Taylor, 'O'Brien, James (1804–1864), Chartist,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography'* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20457 (accessed 12 July 2020); O'Brien supported radical reform, was a co-operator and critic of capitalism, and can probably be characterised as an early socialist at this point. A. Plummer, *Bronterre: A Political Biography of Bronterre O'Brien*, *1804-1864* (London: George Allen, 1971), pp. 35-43.
[54] Hampton, *Early Cooperation in Birmingham,* p. 23.
[55] *Midland Representative and Birmingham Herald (MR)*, 23 April 1831 and passim.
[56] Brock, *The Great Reform Act,* p. 168.
[57] Briggs, 'Press and Public', *Collected Essays,* Vol. One, p. 113.
[58] As did Edmonds in a reply to critic James Bibb in May 1830.
[59] 'Warwickshire County', in ed. D. Fisher, *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1820-1832*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009), available at: http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/warwickshire (accessed 26 June 2020).

illustrated in an editorial in August 1831. This differentiated four wings in the arguments around the Reform Bill: those opposed to it who wanted to defend privilege; those who wanted the Bill for their own ends and ambitions; those like the *Midland Representative* who saw it as a first step; and those who were opposed to it either because they wanted a perfect solution or because they were 'fierce levellers'.[60]

There is evidence of Edmonds writing for the paper. In the 28 August 1831 edition, a 'GE' writes against capital punishment, using a combination of Benthamite and radical Christian ideas that point to Edmonds as the author.[61] Jesus Christ provided the model of forgiveness and there was no justification in Christian terms for capital punishment, but it was also necessary to ask whether it would promote human happiness. The author saw crime as the effect of moral disease and argued that the current system fostered offending rather than prevented it. Capital punishment could not promote the happiness of mankind.[62] Such a view was part of developing sentiment against capital punishment but was undoubtedly an advanced and controversial opinion.[63]

The *Midland Representative* lasted until June 1832, covering the activities of the reform movement, taking a more critical stance than did the *Birmingham Journal* and with O'Brien increasingly warning about the limits of the Bill.[64] It included reports of agricultural and industrial protest and repression, as well as of international affairs. It reported on the campaign against the stamp duty on newspapers, the 'taxes on

[60] *MR,* 27 August 1831.
[61] *MR*, 20 August 1831.
[62] *MR,* 20 August 1831.
[63] 'Letters from Charles Dickens on Capital Punishment, 23 February-16 March 1846', London, British Library, available at https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/letters-from-charles-dickens-on-capital-punishment-23-february---16-march-1846 (accessed 2 December 2020)
[64] Plummer, *Bronterre,* p. 42. The *Midland Representative* merged with the *Journal* in June 1832.

knowledge', and was sympathetic to the cooperative movement.[65] It reflected the thinking of the respectable but radical wing of the reform movement in which the apparently antithetical ideas of Bentham and Robert Owen were influential.

Edmonds supported the campaign against the 'taxes on knowledge'; he spoke at a meeting in January 1832 against the taxes and was placed on the committee alongside O'Brien and other radicals.[66] He and Pare spoke out at the Political Council in favour of its taking up the question, against T.C. Salt (1788-1859), who considered that this might harm the relationship with the ministers they were trying to influence.[67] In October 1832 a 'crowded' public meeting with Edmonds in the chair was held in the Union Rooms at Great Charles Street and formed a society to aid victims of the laws.[68] In 1834, several campaigners, including bookseller and co-operator James Guest, were imprisoned in Warwick and Edmonds succeeded in getting them moved to the debtors' side of the jail.[69]

The question of religious emancipation was another arena of political thought and controversy in which Edmonds was involved. The mid-1820s saw a renewed campaign for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and Baptists republished Samuel Pearce's 1790 Cannon Street sermon which denounced the Acts.[70] On this occasion there was much less controversy in the town than there had been at the time of Pearce's sermon. All the dissenting congregations, including the Baptists,

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[65] *MR,* 16 July 1831. It was priced '3d, taxes to suppress knowledge, 4d'.
[66] *MR,* 28 January 1832. The membership encompassed co-operators and radical members of the Political Council: Weston, O'Brien, Edmonds, Haynes, Blunt, Pare, Jennings, Giles, Dyer, Morrison.
[67] *MR,* 3 February 1832. For Salt, see Appendix C.
[68] *PMG*, 27 October 1832.
[69] J. Guest, 'A Free Press', in W. Hutton, *An History of Birmingham*; Hampton, *Early Cooperation in Birmingham,* p. 18. Guest was appointed vice president of the Birmingham Cooperative Society in 1829.
[70] S. Pearce, *The Oppressive, Unjust, and Profane Nature and Tendency of Corporation and Test Acts: Exposed, in a Sermon, Preached Before the Congregation of Protestant Dissenters, Meeting in Cannon St., Birmingham, Feb. 21, 1790* (London: Wightman and Cramp, 1827).

sent petitions which joined the hundreds that reached Parliament in 1827-1828 before the Acts were repealed.[71] The issue of Catholic Emancipation caused much more controversy in the town, and here Edmonds showed his preparedness to take on a difficult issue, even if it meant courting unpopularity. Many Baptists supported both Catholic civil rights and the end of the Irish tithe system. However, they opposed any state subsidy being granted to Catholic priests in Ireland, arguing that this would violate their principles of opposition to a priestly hierarchy and an established church.[72] Edmonds' opinions on Catholic Emancipation reflected this dual position. At a dinner held by the Midland Catholic Association in 1826, Edmonds defended religious liberty, declaring that no-one should be persecuted for following 'the dictates of an honest conscience in approaching the great Father of Peace' but he opposed substituting one established church for another.[73] Despite his differences with the Catholic campaigners, he continued to support calls for emancipation and defended Reverend T.M. McDonnell's right to speak on several occasions, a stance that probably aided later collaboration with him in the movement for political reform.[74] That defence was significant: as the debate over Catholic Emancipation became more heated, so did the atmosphere in the town. In 1828, walls were covered with anti-Catholic placards and when Daniel O'Connell (1775–1847) paid a visit, his coach was surrounded and threatened.[75] The divisions in the

[71] *ABG*, 4 June 1827; *Baptist Magazine*, Vol. IXX 1827, pp. 232-4, 325-6.
[72] R. Cowherd, *The Politics of English Dissent; the Religious Aspects of Liberal and Humanitarian Reform Movements from 1815 to 1848* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), p. 33. Cowherd states that Robert Hall was a supporter of Catholic Emancipation.
[73] BA&C 64279, *Report of the Proceedings of the Midland Catholic Association at their Annual Meeting held at the Royal Hotel Birmingham Tuesday April 18th 1826* (London: William Andrews, n.d. [1826]).
[74] *BJ*, 13 December 1828, 28 February 1829. See also Appendix C for McDonnell.
[75] J. Jaffray 'Hints for a History of Birmingham', Part XXIV in *BJ*, 12 December 1855; R. Comerford, 'O'Connell, Daniel (1775–1847), Irish nationalist leader', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20501 (accessed 12 July 2020).

town were illustrated by the fact that when Isaac Spooner organised a meeting in support of the *status quo,* his brother Richard Spooner, a loyal Anglican, risked a serious rift in his family when he organised a counter-meeting, together with Edmonds and Carr's Lane minister John Angell James. These events were held semi-privately because of the volatile atmosphere, but there was 'very vigorous petitioning'.[76] The overall attitude of public opinion in the town was shown in the numbers. The pro-Emancipation petition garnered just over five thousand signatures while the anti-Emancipation petition achieved 36,000, a number that suggests anti-Catholic sentiment was still widely held, probably by both dissenters and Anglicans.[77]

Edmonds was a supporter of the campaign for the total abolition of slavery and active in the Birmingham Anti-Slavery Society formed in 1826.[78] The abolitionist movement was initially revived in Birmingham in 1825 by the Birmingham Ladies' Negro's Friends Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves.[79] As the national and local campaign developed, Baptists became particularly prominent because of the role of their missionaries in Jamaica who came under attack from plantation owners.[80] The aftermath of the 'Baptist War' – the Sharpe Rebellion of January 1831 – left many rebels dead and missionaries under arrest. Baptist minister William Knibb (1803–1845) returned to Britain in 1832 and began a lecture tour.[81] Edmonds proposed the resolution at the AGM of the BPU on 30 July 1832 which called for abolition of the

[76] Jaffray, 'Hints for a History', XXIV; Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, pp. 478-9.
[77] Jaffray, 'Hints for a History', XXIV.
[78] BA&C MS 3058/1, Minute Book of the Birmingham Anti-Slavery Society, 1826-1836.
[79] BA&C MS 3173/1(b), 2(a), Ladies' Negro's Friends Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves, Reports, 1826-1845.
[80] C. Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), pp. 88-106.
[81] G. Heuman, 'Knibb, William (1803–1845), missionary and abolitionist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-15714 (accessed 12 July 2020); M. Watts, *The Dissenters, Vol. 2, The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), p. 449.

system ‘which consigns 800,000 of our fellow subjects, entitled to the same natural rights as ourselves, to privations, toils and miseries unparalleled in the history of the world’.[82] Edmonds insisted that pledges in favour of abolition should be collected from any parliamentary candidate. This was agreed, although Edmonds was involved in a spat with Reverend McDonnell over the wording.[83]

Most radicals, such as Bronterre O’Brien, were abolitionists.[84] However, there was a strain of radical thought with an ‘England first’ bias. For some, resentment at the hypocrisy of abolitionist leaders overcame fellow feeling for slaves.[85] Edmonds found himself under attack at a meeting in April 1833 called to press for immediate abolition. The meeting eventually had to be abandoned after a fierce contest when ‘popular elements from the Political Union’ protested at the hypocrisy of many anti-slavery supporters who countenanced oppression at home. This position was supported by G.F. Muntz, who argued for gradual emancipation, saying that the manufacturing interest would otherwise be harmed. Edmonds had to call up all his influence to gain a hearing. In an argument that combined an element of class solidarity with patriotic duty, Edmonds declared ‘the self-same men who were oppressing the negro, oppressed them also. The slaves in the West Indies were weak and could not help themselves and would Englishmen refuse to help them?’[86] At the Political Council of the BPU the following week, even William Pare suggested

[82] *BJ,* 4 August 1832. A few days later a meeting was held at Carr’s Lane Church, addressed by Knibb.
[83] *BJ*, 4 August 1832; BA&C MS 3058/1, Minute Book of the Birmingham Anti-Slavery Society, August 4th 1832. Another of Edmonds’ fallings out although this was short-lived and seems to have been related to Edmonds’ dispute with Scholefield over who should be the second BPU candidate.
[84] R. Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 536.
[85] Hollis, P. ‘Anti-Slavery and British Working-Class Radicalism in the Years of Reform’, in C. Bolt and S. Drescher (eds.), *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1980), pp. 294-315.
[86] *ABG,* 20 April 1820; *BJ,* 20 April 1833; Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, pp. 558-561. Edmonds’ paternalistic reference to the slaves being ‘weak’ may have been designed to win over support but did reflect the situation after the brutal suppression of the Sharpe Rebellion.

that putting forward the petition against slavery at a time of great distress at home was inopportune. Edmonds responded, saying that while he was as disgusted as anyone at the 'inconsistent conduct' of some advocates of abolition, this should not lead them to abandon the cause: 'Would they say that because they could not do one particular good, they could not do another?'[87]

It was, perhaps, with this argument still in mind, that at the Newhall Hill meeting in May 1833, Edmonds suggested that the black-led government of Haiti was more effective than that of the Whigs:

> In the island of San Domingo they were not blessed with any of these great and enlightened men for their governors. They had no honest Althorps or school master Broughams. They had negros for their ministers of state and yet they contrived to find remunerating employment for the population….In God's name then as the English once sent to the continent for a king, let them now send to San Domingo for a negro ministry to teach us how to secure ample wages for labour, for he was sure they would rather have a ministry like those who were black without, than one like our own who were black within.[88]

Edmonds may have used language and expressions that grate on the modern ear, but his sentiments were egalitarian. As with his argument against capital punishment, he combined radical Christianity with a rationalist commitment to

[87] *BJ,* 27 April 1833.
[88] BA&C 60744, *Report of the proceedings of the Great Public Meeting of the inhabitants of Birmingham and its neighbourhood held at Newhall Hill on Monday May 20th 1833 convened by the Council of the Political Union for the purpose of petitioning His Majesty to dismiss his ministers* (Birmingham, 1833), p. 10.

humanitarian principles and, in his explanation of the common interest of workers at home and slaves abroad, something akin to early socialist ideas.

Although some Birmingham radicals took the view that the movement should concentrate on the franchise or alleviating distress at home, there was also a long-running strain of internationalism, lying sometimes comfortably, sometimes uneasily alongside the dominant discourse of patriotic loyalty to the constitution. The resolution passed at the first Newhall Hill meeting in 1817 had included a clause deploring the re-imposition of the Bourbon dynasty on the French people 'contrary to their universal will'.[89] In the BPU, support for Polish independence became a significant cause. As Andy Greene points out, Poland became regarded as an oppressed victim of imperial tyranny. The BPU welcomed the exiled Count Czapski onto its Political Council and a pro-Polish banner 'A Tear for Poland' can be seen in the famous 'Gathering of the Unions' painting of the Newhall Hill meetings in May 1832.[90] The Irish question likewise commanded attention, and the BPU maintained close relations with Daniel O'Connell, even asking him to delay raising the question of the Union until reform was granted. When O'Connell pressed for a more extensive Irish Reform Bill, the BPU was then bound to support him, which it did in the first mass meeting called after the Reform Act was passed.[91] A substantial Irish presence, and sympathy, amongst the trades was reflected in the banner of the United Irishmen, in the parade of August 1832. Alongside a picture of O'Connell were two figures in chains, one an African slave and the other labelled 'poor Poles in

[89] BA&C 51005, *Report of the Town's Meeting held on Newhall Hill Birmingham on Wednesday January 22nd 1817.*
[90] A. Green, 'A Tear for Poland', *History West Midlands*, pp. 40-42, available at *https://historywm.com/articles/a-tear-for-poland* (accessed 20 May 2020).
[91] BA&C 64665, *Report of the Proceedings of the Public Meeting of the inhabitants of Birmingham held at Newhall Hill Monday June 25th 1832*, *for the purpose of expressing their opinion on the Irish Reform Bill and petitioning the legislature* (Birmingham: Hodgetts, 1832); Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union,* pp. 94-95.

Siberia'.[92] O'Connell was the invited guest speaker at the Newhall Hill meeting of May 1833, called to protest at the Whig government's lack of action over distress and the Irish Coercion Bill. Edmonds moved the petition, calling for the resignation of the government: 'The Whigs had brought forward a bill that was in opposition to all the principles they had formerly professed.'[93]

These wider principles did not extend to gender equality. Tensions existed between the view that women's role was in the sphere of the home, and the desire of some women to be active in public affairs, a tension only partially resolved by the various ways in which women were able to act through networks, churches, and their own organisations, such as in friendly societies and in the campaign against slavery.[94] For men in public life, including radicals, a typical day would be full of activity, but this depended on women's work at home, whether as wives or servants. In Birmingham, women's participation in the reform movement had been seen in their participation in the Newhall Hill Meetings and their being acknowledged at radical dinners.[95] This limited presence was noted again in the *Report* of the October 1830 BPU dinner celebrating the French July Revolution: 'A considerable number of ladies occupied the upper galleries above Mr B.'s sales rooms and appeared highly amused and gratified by the spectacle.'[96] By the following year, women were present at the BPU's Annual General Meeting and Edmonds combined gallantry with

[92] *BJ*, 25 August 1832.
[93] *Report of the Proceedings, Monday May 20th 1833,* p. 9.
[94] C. Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: the British Campaigns 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1992); C. Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 151-171; D. Thompson, *Outsiders: Class, Gender and Nation* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 77-102; L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837,* Revised ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 269-287; S. Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in 19th-Century Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).
[95] See Chapter Four.
[96] BA&C 442197 *Report of the Proceedings at the Dinner of the BPU held at Mr Beardsworth's Repository on Monday October 11th 1830 to commemorate the French Revolution of July 1830* (Birmingham,1830).

an acknowledgement of their political role. He celebrated the presence of women at the meeting, with the implication that this was an innovation.

> He congratulated his hearers upon the attendance of the ladies for although he believed himself to be a disinterested philanthropist, he confessed they upon all occasions enjoyed the better half of his affections and admiration. He looked to them for the exercise of their legitimate influence over their husbands, children and aye, even their sweethearts.[97]

This reference anticipated the later appeal by T.C. Salt, 'To the Women of Birmingham', in 1838, and reflected the mainstream radical approach which acknowledged women as actors in the field but in a restricted and respectable manner.[98] Daniel O'Connell adopted the same tone of gallantry to the band of several hundred women who marched from Rowley Regis to one of the reform meetings on Newhall Hill, referring to them as 'fair, gentle and good'. Holyoake approved of O'Connell's approach even though, he noted, the women could hardly be 'gentle' given the fact that they were standing their ground amid thousands of men.[99] This reveals the limits of what was considered respectable behaviour. In August 1832 there was further evidence of an organised female presence in a respectable setting, when a ball for the 'female reformers' took place at the end of the day's celebrations organised by the United Trades.[100]

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[97] BA&C 442201, *Report of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Birmingham Political Union held at Mr Beardsworth's Repository on Monday July 4th 1831* (Birmingham, 1831). Women were present at mass meetings but there is no sign that they attended meetings of the Political Council.

[98] Salt's appeal is discussed in Chapter Seven. That the female presence was the first thing noted by Edmonds perhaps suggests an advance on the situation at the Dinner for T.C. Wooler in 1822, where female reformers were mentioned rather as an afterthought in the *Report* of that event. See Chapter Five.

[99] Holyoake, *Sixty Years*, p. 36. Holyoake does not specify which of the meetings.

[100] Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, p. 623.

The cooperative and Owenite movement led the way in terms of the participation of women alongside men. Women were able to join the Birmingham Cooperative Society and at its first anniversary in 1829, the hundred-plus attendees included wives and children.[101] In 1833 a women's support committee was set up to help the locked-out Derby silk-workers.[102] The Owenite Frances Morrison, writing as a 'Bondswoman' in the *Pioneer,* edited by her husband James, ensured regular coverage of women's concerns, including education and equal pay.[103] At times she despaired:

> The working men complain that the masters exercise authority over them....But speak of any project which shall diminish the authority of the male, or give him an equal where once he found an inferior, and then the spirit of Toryism awakes that has long been dormant. All men are Tories by nature.[104]

Frances later moved to Salford, and the Owenite movement declined, but her writing shows that the issue of women's roles was being discussed in radical circles. Women's participation in the reform movement became a significant question in the late 1830s and is further discussed in Chapter Seven.

Edmonds brought his own radical Christian thought, influenced by Benthamism, into the mix of political discussion alive in Birmingham in the early 1830s. George Barnsby lists Edmonds as one of a very few early socialists in Birmingham in this

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[101] Hampton, *Early Cooperation in Birmingham,* p. 18.
[102] *Pioneer,* No. 17, 28 December 1832.
[103] B. Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (London: Virago, 1993), pp. 73-77, 96; B. Taylor, 'Morrison, Frances (1807–1898), socialist writer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-50075 (accessed 12 July 2020).
[104] *Pioneer*, No. 29, 22 March 1834.

period.[105] This is a fine judgement: Edmonds was not a fully-fledged Owenite although he was prepared to consider the plan for a Labour Exchange. For the most part Edmonds remained committed to the programme of popular radicalism which saw parliamentary reform as the means to achieving economic and social improvement. His egalitarianism and humanism were most strongly expressed in his positions on slavery, capital punishment and religious equality and there are signs in his discussion of these topics of a wider, internationalist view of equality and human solidarity. His was an eclectic, pragmatic approach to radical thought and action. That pragmatism is most apparent in his activity in pursuit of national political reform, covered in the following section.

Edmonds' participation and significance in the Birmingham Political Union 1830-32

This section focuses on Edmonds' activity in the BPU, his significance in founding and building the Union, his actions at crisis points and the nature of the compromises he made. This examination of Edmonds' role throws light on the degree of support that Attwood's programme of limited reform commanded amongst BPU supporters, compared to the strength of challenge from those who adhered to the programme of popular radicalism. Behagg refers to Attwood as 'riding the tiger', suggesting that the BPU leaders were operating on the back of a popular movement that they might not be able to control.[106] An examination of the revolutionary crises in the Autumn of 1831 and the Days of May, 1832, provides a focus for discussing this view (see Figure 6.1).

[105] Barnsby, *Birmingham Working People,* p. 66. Barnsby's list appears to have been made with some thought; the others on his list are John Rabone, William Pare, Joseph Hanson, the Holyoake brothers and Frederick Hollick, all associated with the Owenite movement.
[106] Behagg, *Politics and Production,* pp. 158-183 and *Labour and Reform: Working-Class Movements 1815-1914* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), pp. 27-32.

The Birmingham Political Union 1830-32		
1830	25 Jan	Launch of BPU
	Feb	Marquess of Blandford Bill
	17 May	BPU Meeting supports Blandford proposals
	June	Death George IV
	July	Election Fall of Bourbons 26 July First AGM BPU
	August	Election, Distress
	Sept	Tories returned, reduced majority
	11 Oct	BPU French Revolution dinner
	Nov	Government defeated, Wellington resigns, Whigs take office
	Dec	Town's Meeting; Petition of Right
1831	Jan	Henry Hunt visit to Birmingham; BPU Section dinners
	March	Russell introduces Reform Bill; BPU Meeting to support Bill
	April	Bill defeated, Dissolution of Parliament
	May	Election campaign
	June	Whigs win large majority; Reform Bill reintroduced.
	4 July	BPU AGM
	Sept	Bill passes Commons, Town's Meeting for Reform
	3 Oct 7 Oct	Newhall Hill Meeting Lords rejects Bill, Tolling of bells, 'Patience' placards Rioting Nottingham, Derby, Bristol
	Nov	BPU preparations for district organisation and drilling – but plans abandoned
	Dec	Reform Bill reintroduced Commons
1832	Jan	King agrees to create Whig peers if necessary
	March	Commons passes Bill, sent to Lords
	May 7 May 9 May 15 May 16 May	Days of May: Great Newhall Hill Meeting Grey defeated in Lords and resigns News reaches Birmingham, gentlemen sign pledge, Newhall Hill Plan for march on London. Orders to Scots Greys Grey recalled. King agrees to create peers if necessary Rejoicing, Newhall Hill
	4 June	Lords passes Reform Act. Newhall Hill meeting on Irish Reform Bill
	July	AGM

Figure 6.1 Timeline: the Birmingham Political Union 1830-32

In 1829, a year of poor trade, Thomas Attwood became convinced that parliamentary reform was needed if his currency reforms were ever to be successful. He instigated a Town's Meeting on 8 May 1829 and spoke at length on the distressed state of the country and the need for currency reform, calling himself a 'radical reformer'.[107] Edmonds supported this petition which collected 40,000 signatures.[108] By December 1829 Attwood had won over his own circle to support a campaign for parliamentary reform.[109] He was rebuffed by most of the leading local Whigs, although one Whig-leaning merchant, Joshua Scholefield (1774/5–1844), a fellow currency reformer, joined Attwood and thirteen others on 14 December at the Royal Hotel.[110] Edmonds may have been at the second meeting of this group: he was certainly a signatory to the requisition for a Town's Meeting. The inclusion of radicals Edmonds, Russell, Pare and Josiah Emes alongside manufacturers like G.F. Muntz suggests that Edmonds was already involved in the work to broaden and build Attwood's coalition.[111] The radicals' experience in mobilising large numbers was shown in the preparations for the first mass meeting on Monday 25 January. The town was

[107] BA&C 74299, *Speech of Thomas Attwood on the Distressed State of the Country at the Town's meeting 8th May 1829* (Birmingham: Beilby, Knott and Beilby, 1829).
[108] Wakefield, *Life of Thomas Attwood,* p. 124. Most signatories were probably in support of its plea for action against distress rather than its currency proposals.
[109] Carlos Flick refers to the Tories around Attwood as 'Ultra' or 'High' Tories. The term 'Ultra-Tory' implies one who was of the 'country party' hostile to Westminster and alienated by Wellington's acceptance of Catholic Emancipation. However, the main motivation for the Birmingham Attwood group's support for political reform came from their support for currency reform and despair at the general distress and poor trade. Flick, *Birmingham Political Union,* pp. 20-21; Gill, *History of Birmingham*, pp. 303-5.
[110] BA&C 89051a, Copy of the original handwritten circular letter calling a meeting at the Royal Hotel on 14 December 1829; *BJ,* 19 December 1929; J. Jaffray, 'Hints for a History of Birmingham,' *BJ* 12 December 1855; Flick *The Birmingham Political Union,* p.24; R. Davis, 'Scholefield, Joshua (1774/5-1844), politician and businessman', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-24814 (accessed 12 July 2020).
[111] *BJ,* 16 January 1830; *ABG,* 25 January 1830; Flick, *Birmingham Political Union,* pp. 25-26.

placarded with notices that urged all classes to attend.[112] Meeting on 'Saint Monday' was the least disruptive time and was attractive to masters as well as workers.[113]

The meeting of 25 January 1830, attended by many thousands of middle- and working-class residents in Beardsworth's Repository, marked the start of the Birmingham Political Union (BPU).[114] The *Declaration*, which included the *Objects and Rules and Regulation of the Union,* contained a very general statement of reform aims, to obtain 'a real and effectual Representation of the Lower and Middle Classes of Parliament', to secure the rights of 'the industrious classes' by legal means and to reform the taxation system. There was no specific mention of currency reform.[115] The Union was set on its course of class cooperation and extra-parliamentary, but lawful, protest. Edmonds was a signatory to the *Declaration*, and became a member of the first Political Council.[116] This Council was to be selected annually, and the members meanwhile should 'obey strictly all the just and legal directions of the Political Council', and pay dues of 1s a quarter.[117] Flick remarks that this constitution had an 'unabashedly authoritarian character'.[118] However, in practice, the Political Council had to respond to its members to keep its broad church

[112] HO 52/11/166, ff 394a-395, Isaac Spooner, Thomas Lee and J.F. Ledsam to Peel, January 21 1830 with enclosed handbill, unfortunately the handbill is missing; Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, p.27.
[113] Hopkins, *Rise of the Manufacturing Town*, pp. 102, 110.
[114] BA&C 442194**,** *Report of the Proceedings at the Meeting of the Inhabitants of Birmingham Held on Monday 25th January 1830 at Mr Beardsworth's Repository, for the establishment of a General Political Union, with the view of obtaining a Redress of Public Wrongs and Grievances* (Birmingham, 1830). The Report, the first of a long line of published reports on large meetings, claimed that 12-15,000 people were present and that the meeting lasted from mid-morning to late afternoon; Flick, *Birmingham Political Union,* pp. 24-27; Wakefield, *Life of Thomas Attwood,* pp. 131-137.
[115] *Report, Monday 25th January*, p. 10; Wakefield, *Life of Thomas Attwood*, pp. 131-7; Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 1, pp. 534-537.
[116] *Report, Monday 25th January,* pp. 11-15.
[117] *Report, Monday 25th January*, p. 11.
[118] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union,* p. 29.

alliance alive. The mass character that gave sustenance to Attwood's project also put pressure on the BPU leadership.

Edmonds' importance to Attwood's coalition was demonstrated in this first meeting. He intervened several times to plead for a hearing for the established Whig reformers, Joseph Parkes and William Redfern, who, fearful that Attwood and his co-thinkers would subsume political reform to their own ends, proposed that the meeting should agree a petition rather than set up a new organisation. Once he had established Parkes' right to speak, Edmonds then spoke against his amendment:

> Of itself it was unobjectionable, but it was introduced for the purpose of cutting off the most important object of the meeting..... Mr Edmonds then happily contrasted the manly conduct of the Tories as compared with the insincere and dirty conduct of the Whigs whom he described as extremely patriotic tea-table politicians but who would never do anything except with closed doors...[119]

He then produced a letter that Thomas Osler, a glass manufacturer and Whig sympathiser, had sent to him in 1818, declining to attend a radical meeting. Edmonds declared this showed that the Whigs were always reluctant to act.[120] He concluded 'an animated and humorous speech' by urging all to enrol their names and sat down 'amongst loud and vehement cheering'. The motion was then put and carried 20-1 'amidst the most deafening cheers'.[121] The episode shows Edmonds' willingness to call for fair treatment in meetings but also to play to the gallery and

[119] *Report, Monday 25th January,* p. 15.
[120] See Chapter Four. Osler, a glass trinket and candelabra manufacturer, ably defended himself in a letter to the *Gazette*, pointing out that his position in 1818 had been similar that of Thomas Attwood and others whom Edmonds was now lauding, *ABG*, 1 February 1830.
[121] *Report, Monday 25th January,* p. 15.

may reveal his resentment at the falling away of Whig support in times of difficulties (and a habit of storing letters!). His speech drew a compliment from the Tory-Radical *Monthly Argus*, which at the time was still friendly to the BPU: Mr Edmonds made 'a powerful and well-managed speech, which had an astonishing effect upon the meeting, and opened the eyes of those Joseph Parkes wished to delude'.[122] Attwood and his fellow speakers may have led the speeches, but Edmonds was needed to defend the Union.

Almost immediately, Edmonds and others from a popular radical background were faced with a request to make a political compromise. Attwood asked the Political Council to support the Marquis of Blandford's Bill for reform which included household but not universal male suffrage; this was agreed in March 1830 and endorsed at a mass meeting on 17 May.[123] Edmonds moved the report of the Council with some difficulty, having lost his voice while organising the parade, and sought to justify its position. He himself was 'disposed to look favourably on unlimited franchise and vote by ballot'. However, they needed the support of these influential people to succeed.[124] Then came a classic piece of Edmonds pragmatism, laced with a reference to Benthamite principles, in which he justified his support of a proposal that fell short of the popular radical programme:

> He warned the meeting against being led away by those theorists who would accept nothing unless they got all – who, if they could not obtain what they wanted at once, were unwilling to receive it by slow degrees; and were too fond of claiming things merely because they considered

[122] *Monthly Argus*, Vol. I, New Series, No. 7, February 1830, p. 349.
[123] *BJ,* 20 March; BA&C 442195, *Report of the Proceedings of the First Meeting of the Birmingham Political Union Held at Mr Beardsworth's Repository on Monday May 17th 1830* (Birmingham, 1830); Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 39-40.
[124] *Report, Monday May 17th 1830,* pp. 6-7.

> them as rights, without first taking into consideration the first and most vital role by which they ought to be regulated – the happiness of the people. It mattered not whether the elective franchise was universal, or extended merely to householders, if both equally tended to confer happiness on the people.[125]

James Bibb, 'a mechanic', gained considerable support when he objected to an alliance between the middle and working class 'where the latter's rights were forgotten', but abandoned his protest once both Edmonds and Attwood had replied.[126] This incident confirms the existence of a left wing amongst the supporters of the Union. Bibb's was not a lone voice; there had been opposition within the Council before the meeting and both Hunt and Cobbett were critical of the BPU for this compromise.[127] Hunt was reported to have exclaimed of Edmonds: 'What has become of him?'[128]

If Edmonds' political significance was clear by this point, so was his importance in organising a mass campaign. Already at the meeting on Monday 17 May 1830, much of the symbolism that came to characterise the BPU was on show. A new medal had been struck, and on-the-spot membership was organised.[129] Huge crowds assembled in town before moving to Beardsworth's Repository. The *Report* notes that: 'Mr Edmonds' known influence over the populace was never more conspicuously displayed than on this occasion. With the beck of a hand he

[125] *Report, Monday May 17th 1830,* p.7.
[126] *Report, Monday May 17th 1830,* pp. 8-9, 13. Bibb was quickly taken on to the Political Council (Flick, p. 75).
[127] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union,* pp. 39-40; LoPatin, *Political Unions,* p. 186.
[128] *Monthly Argus*, June 1830, p. 549.
[129] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union,* p. 40.

succeeded … in marshalling the dense thousands occupying every avenue...'[130] By the time of the first AGM, on Monday 26 July, the Union band had its own uniform, with union jacks in their caps.[131] Later in the year, at the dinner held to celebrate the French July Revolution, over three thousand sat down at Beardsworth's accompanied by entertainment, singing, and much toasting of the French people.

Parades alone could not sustain the Union, however impressive and significant. At the May 1830 meeting, Attwood acknowledged that the middle-class leaders of the town were not coming forward as he had hoped. This left the Union financially dependent on the lower-middle and working-class supporters who made up its base. The plebeian members of the union started to use their own tried methods of organisation, setting up discussions in taverns and building Union 'sections'.[132] When dinners were held on 25 January 1831 to celebrate the BPU's first anniversary, celebrations were held at some 20-30 'sectional houses'. Even if Attwood's claim of nine thousand members, made at his own *Globe* dinner, was exaggerated, this account suggests an organisation rooted in Birmingham localities.[133] Here was the base of the BPU, including artisans, small masters and shopkeepers, a source of support for and potential pressure on the Attwood leadership.

Edmonds was significantly involved in another tactic which helped to root the BPU in town life – that of intervening in civic affairs. This was a time of political flux when

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[130] *Report, Monday May 17th 1830,* p. 1. The *Monthly Argus* suggested that Edmonds may have penned this himself as he was known to frequent the *Journal* offices, where the *Reports* were written but there is no further evidence to back up this typically caustic comment (*Monthly Argus*, Vol. 1, June 1830, p. 549).
[131] Wakefield, *Life of Thomas Attwood*, pp. 145-6.
[132] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 36- 38. Flick points out that unlike Daniel O'Connell, whose Catholic Association provided something of a template for the BPU, the Union did not have the church as a vehicle for collections.
[133] *BJ,* 22 and 29 January 1831. Such clubs were almost always exclusively male.

alliances were created, broken and re-formed. Four prominent Political Union members, G.F. Muntz, Edmonds, Benjamin Hadley (1791-1843?) and silversmith Charles Jones led opposition to a new costly Burial Act in March 1830.[134] When leading dissenters, including Edmonds and Joseph Parkes, opposed Church plans for the Free Grammar School, they were joined by Anglican members of the BPU's Political Council.[135] A group of BPU council members, including Edmonds and Muntz, intervened in the church rates issue.[136] At the AGM of July 1831, Edmonds celebrated the fact that the Union was now involved in 'doings not sayings'. Churchwardens, constables, Governors of the Grammar School, Guardians and even the Street Commissioners were now subject to the pressure of public opinion, he declared.[137] For Edmonds this was a continuation of the campaign for accountability at a local level, begun in 1819.[138]

If local developments strengthened the BPU, national events were more significant in determining the course of the reform campaign. The election of summer 1830 was followed by the Whigs taking office in November under Lord Grey, providing a new focus for agitation. Supporters of the traditional programme of popular radicalism, including Edmonds, could now advance their demands as part of pressure for a government Reform Bill. Serious distress and protest in the countryside added urgency to the demands for reform.[139] In December 1830, Edmonds, together with the Whig Joseph Parkes, tacked to the left. At a Town's Meeting, Parkes spoke up

[134] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, p. 42. For Hadley and Jones, see Appendix C.
[135] J. Buckley, *Joseph Parkes of Birmingham* (London: Methuen, 1926) pp. 51-4; *BJ*, 29 May, 7 and 26 June 1830
[136] See Chapter Seven.
[137] BA&C 467721, *Report of the Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the BPU held at Mr Beardsworth's Repository on Monday July 26th 1830* (Birmingham: 1830).
[138] See Chapter Four.
[139] E. Pearce, *Reform: the Fight for the 1832 Reform Act* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003), pp. 66-68.

for the ballot, and Edmonds moved a resolution for a reformed Commons.[140] A 'Petition of Right' was passed, which included the abolition of the property qualification for MPs, Triennial Parliaments, a taxation-based franchise and a secret ballot.[141] When Henry Hunt, then MP for Preston, visited the Midlands in January 1831, his reception showed his continued popularity and a degree of rapprochement with Edmonds. The *Gazette* was at its most dismissive, referring to a 'motley procession, under the superintendence of Messrs Russell and Edmonds and other less distinguished members of the Union'.[142] The *Journal*, by now a firm supporter of the BPU, was also hostile to Hunt, commenting that Birmingham 'has endured a visitation from this "matchless" radical'. However, its report casts a light on mass participation and sentiment in the reform movement. 'Thousands of the working classes poured out of town' to greet Hunt on Monday 3 January. A cavalcade was organised from Handsworth, with the band and banners of the Political Union, a carriage full of mechanics and a barouche for Hunt and companions. Once the procession arrived at Constitution Hill, it halted at George Edmonds' house.[143] Hunt spoke to the 'immense' crowds from the garden. Edmonds introduced Hunt in 'extravagant' terms and in return Hunt welcomed the fact that the BPU was now committed to the ballot. Later Hunt met Attwood and attended a meeting of the Political Council.[144] His next stop was Coventry, accompanied by Edmonds, who

[140] Buckley, *Joseph Parkes,* pp. 66-67; Wakefield, *Life of Thomas Attwood*, p. 184.
[141] BA&C 442198, *Report of the proceedings at the Town's Meeting held in Mr Beardsworth's Repository on Monday 13th December 1830 in support of Parliamentary Reform*; Moss, *Thomas Attwood*, p. 189. Whether or not Attwood was 'furious' with Edmonds and the radicals as Moss suggests, the Petition of Right never became policy; Ward, *City State and Nation*, p. 27.
[142] *BJ*, 8th January 1831; Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, p. 541; J. Belchem, *Orator Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working-Class Radicalism* (London: Breviary, 2012 [1985]), p. 167. Hunt placed an order for medals to celebrate his election victory with BPU Council member Charles Jones
[143] Then at 6 St Luke's Row, Constitution Hill. The report suggests that the 'garden' was raised off the street, enabling Hunt and Edmonds to use it as a platform.
[144] *BJ*, 8 January 1831.

declared his agreement with the principles espoused by Hunt, including annual parliaments, universal suffrage and vote by ballot.[145]

However, Edmonds' return to the traditional programme was short-lived. Once the Reform Bill was introduced on 1 March 1831, with its £10 householder clause, Edmonds, along with others including Joseph Russell, fell in behind it.[146] This was in line with the position taken by most of the Political Unions as well as Cobbett and radical London publisher William Carpenter, although Hunt continued to oppose such a compromise.[147] Edmonds showed that he was once more caught between his commitment to the traditional radical programme and his desire for unity within the campaign. This was not the time to press for the extended franchise, he suggested, reprising his earlier pragmatic approach. But he went further this time, defending the Whig proposal not just in terms of preserving unity but with the patriarchal remark that: 'The bill proposed to enfranchise the most honest and trustworthy of their fellow-countrymen – the fathers and heads of families – and at one fell swoop to destroy the factionary nature and character of the representative part of the Legislature.'[148]

If Edmonds and his fellow radicals were involved in a balancing act with regard to the aims of the movement, this was even more the case when it came to the questions of means, especially in the near-revolutionary crises of October 1831 and May 1832.

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[145] *Coventry Herald*, 14 January 1831.
[146] 467723 *Report of the Proceedings at the Town's meeting convened by the BPU in support of his majesty's ministers' measure of parliamentary reform held at Birmingham, Monday March 7th 1831* (Birmingham, 1831). Edmonds was ill at the time of this meeting but sent a note declaring his support for the Political Council. Edmonds' illness, probably related to overwork and his dispute with Joseph Allday, discussed below, dogged him over the period from March to May 1831.
[147] Fraser, *Perilous Question,* pp. 100-101; LoPatin, *Political Unions, Popular Politics,* pp. 68-69. Other sceptical voices such as those of the *Poor Man's Guardian* and the *Midland Representative* have already been described.
[148] *BJ,* 23 April 1831.

After the Second Reform Bill passed the Commons on 22 September 1831, the question became 'What will the Lords do?' and the following few weeks brought a roller-coaster ride in national and local political life.[149] Parkes and Edmonds were both prominent at the Town's Meeting on 30 September, advocating the creation of peers. Edmonds could not resist a little gentle ribbing of John Turner who had just made an impassioned speech for reform:

> He was equally pleased with the sentiments of Mr John Turner who, he believed, had always entertained the opinions he had that day so manfully expressed. For a number of years they had doubtless been struggling for a favourable development.[150]

On 3 October 1831, the day the Bill was debated in the Lords, the BPU took to Newhall Hill. This allowed deputations from the whole region to attend and provided an impressive piece of theatre designed to affect public opinion and put pressure on the Lords.[151] 'The spectacle was the most splendid of the kind we ever remember to have witnessed', wrote the *Journal*. 'On the ridge of the hill which crowned the amphitheatre, the banners, in number about twenty, were placed at equal distances and gave a beautiful finish to the perspective.' Edmonds had a prominent role, beginning the Union Hymn, and speaking after Attwood and Scholefield.[152] His speech was a call to action. If his intervention at the Town's Meeting in September had been long on the need for friendly persuasion and short

[149] Fraser, *Perilous Question*, pp. 131-134.
[150] *BJ,* 1 October 1831.
[151] Fraser, *Perilous Question* p. 134; Wakefield, *Life of Thomas Attwood*, pp. 173-4.
[152] BA&C 442202, *Report of the proceedings at a meeting of the inhabitants of Birmingham held on Newhall Hill 3rd October 1831 convened by the council of the Political Union for the purpose of petitioning the House of Lords to pass the Reform Bill* (Birmingham: Hodgetts, 1831), Edmonds' speech is pp. 4-6; A. Reekes, *Speeches that Changed Britain: Oratory in Birmingham* (Alcester: West Midlands History, 2015), pp. 12-13.

on threat, this speech contained a different balance. He suggested that if moral pressure failed, the people could refuse to pay taxes, using the method of the Quakers.[153] He would be the first to do this if need be. An 'immense forest of hands' showed who would join him. He added a qualification to his usual call for peaceable and legal means:

> They it was who had the most to fear from force or violence; but if the crisis should arrive when force was necessary, he did not fear the result. Much as he dreaded revolution – sanguinary as was the French Revolution he could not but recollect that in wars of despotism more lives had been lost in one battle than in all the conflicts of a revolutionary contest.[154]

This was possibly the most openly revolutionary speech made by Edmonds during the campaign. It was carefully constructed - Parkes claimed he contributed to both Attwood's and Edmonds' speeches.[155] The *Report* appears in the collection of editions approved by Parkes so it is to be assumed that Parkes considered the written formulations to be just inside the law.[156] The mass nature of the protest and the mood of the country also afforded some protection.

The Lords were unpersuaded and defeated the Bill on 8 October. The reaction was immediate but varied. In Birmingham, the news arrived with the 5pm post and muffled bells then tolled all night long.[157] In London, after an initial bout of window-

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[153] This was to allow one's goods to be distrained.
[154] *Report of the proceedings, 3rd October 1831,* p. 6.
[155] Buckley, *Joseph Parkes,* p.74.
[156] BA&C Birmingham Institutions, Vol. 2 Part 1 (E1). Parkes wrote to a correspondent 'The tone just went *up to the mark* and not beyond. I had taken great pains to put Attwood and Edmonds in the right tune on the documents and speeches.' http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/warwickshire (accessed 3 July 2020).
[157] Wakefield, *Life of Thomas Attwood,* p. 184.

breaking, there was a huge and well-stewarded march.[158] There was rioting in Derby and Nottinghamshire.[159] The Political Council issued an address: 'Patience! Patience! Patience! Our beloved King is firm – the House of Commons is firm – the whole nation is firm.' Attwood and Edmonds preached this message from the tavern windows.[160] However, after Parliament was prorogued but not dissolved on 20 October, it became difficult to maintain the reform coalition.[161] Riots broke out in Bristol on 29 and 30 October and protests of various kinds took place on a wider scale. Panic set in on some of the great estates: landowners were conscious of the 'Swing' incendiarism the previous year. At Drayton Manor, near Tamworth, Staffordshire, Peel imported carbines and prepared to defend his estate.[162] Economic difficulties underpinned other local protests, which included a riot by silk-ribbon workers in Coventry and a threatened colliers' march on Dudley Castle.[163]

Nationally, there was increasing talk of a national guard, from 'loyal associations', through to the *Poor Man's Guardian* proposal for a 'Popular Guard'.[164] In Birmingham, the Political Council, increasingly concerned about a break-down in law and order, discussed restructuring the Union on semi-military lines. Charles Jones proposed a National Guard 'to preserve the peace of the town, to protect the lives and property of individuals and to defend the Government and liberty of the nation'.[165] Jones and Edmonds were sent away to further develop the proposals, and both suggested dividing the Union into branches with an officer, so that the peace

[158] Fraser, *Perilous Question,* p. 157.
[159] Brock, *The Great Reform Act,* p. 247; Fraser, *Perilous Question,* p. 152.
[160] Moss, *Thomas Attwood*, pp.202-4. Attwood publicised a letter he had received from Althorp assuring him that the King was committed to reform.
[161] LoPatin, *Political Unions,* p. 86.
[162] Fraser, *Perilous Question,* pp. 169-70.
[163] *BJ,* 12 November 1831.
[164] Brock, *The Great Reform Act,* p. 25.
[165] *BJ*, 5 November 1831.

and security of the town could be restored quickly in the event of riots.[166] This plan was widely reported in the press and viewed with alarm in Whitehall. The *London Evening Standard* declared that the plan was clearly illegal and the Union treasonable.[167] Attwood engineered a partial retreat at the Political Council on 15 November. He stressed that there was no plan to arm the Union. Should further action be needed, he agreed with Edmonds' proposal '… of refusal to pay taxes and suffering one's goods to be distrained, in the manner of the Quakers'. Bosco Attwood moved an amendment to defer a final vote.[168]

Attwood and the BPU leadership, including Edmonds, had sailed close to the wind in speeches throughout the year, from a promise Attwood had made at the January 1831 dinner to put a 'ring of fire' around the King should the oligarchs refuse reform, through to the threat to withhold taxes.[169] Grey was concerned about the spread of political unions and communication between them.[170] William IV issued a Royal Proclamation on 22 November declaring any political union to be illegal if it had a hierarchical structure and assumed power independent of the magistracy.[171] But by then the Political Council, told by Parkes that the plan was unlawful, had abandoned its plan. Edmonds protested at Parkes' interpretation of the law but, 'in the light of the doubts cast and the feelings of many', agreed that the plan should be dropped.[172]

Birmingham's nineteenth-century liberal historians downplayed these events: Langford and Dent refer only to the Royal Proclamation forbidding links between

[166] *BJ,* 12 November 1831.
[167] *London Evening Standard,* 18 November 1831.
[168] *BJ,* 19 November 1831.
[169] *BJ,* 29 January 1831.
[170] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, p. 68.
[171] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, p. 69; Fraser, *Perilous Question,* p. 176.
[172] *BJ*, 26 November 1831.

Political Unions.[173] Wakefield, Attwood's first biographer, describes the Jones report but suggests that it was 'voluntarily abandoned a few days later'.[174] However, this chapter shows that the plan was under serious discussion for three weeks. Moss suggests that the affair was really part of a feint by Attwood.[175] In contrast, Brock and Behagg see the plan as a reflection of the pressure that Attwood was under, with the proposal a compromise between a civic guard for the protection of property and a 'popular' guard.[176] LoPatin considers that the Political Unions saw themselves as 'peacekeepers'.[177] Assessing these alternative views is made more difficult by the fact that, as Thomis and Holt point out, the Union's position was itself ambiguous. The quasi-military structure was presented as a precaution against disorder but at the same time Attwood wanted to stiffen the resolve of the Whigs.[178] In summary, to suggest that the whole proposal was a bluff is perhaps to ignore the levels of unrest, both in Birmingham and its surrounding districts. The plans drawn up by Jones and Edmonds were an attempt to cement the class and political alliance which made up the BPU into a semi-military structure which could secure the peace against attacks from different quarters.[179] In the event, the combination of the Royal Proclamation and a new slightly amended Reform Bill, which passed its Second Reading on 17 December 1831, allowed the crisis to pass.[180]

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[173] R. Dent, *The Making of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Allday, 1894), p.357; Langford, *A Century,* Vol. 2, p. 550.
[174] Wakefield, *Life of Thomas Attwood,* pp. 182-3.
[175] Moss, *Thomas Attwood*, pp. 207-208
[176] Brock, *The Great Reform Act*, p. 254; Behagg, *Politics and Production*, p.171.
[177] LoPatin, *Political Unions,* pp. 87-130.
[178] M. Thomis and P. Holt, *Threats of Revolution in Britain, 1789*-1848 (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 87-89.
[179] This echoes the French National Guard. In the 1789 Revolution, the National Guard had the dual task of repelling the *ancien régime* and keeping order. The immediate model for the BPU plan was probably the 1830 Orléanist Revolution.
[180] Fraser, *Perilous Question,* pp. 177-183.

The next critical phase in May 1832 is covered in much greater detail by Jaffray, Langford and Dent, the BPU seen as having a legitimate and leading role in resolving a national crisis.[181] After the Bill passed its second reading in the Lords on 14 April 1832, the BPU agreed to hold a mass meeting on Newhall Hill on Monday 7 May to put pressure on the Lords. [182] This was another splendid and well-prepared affair.[183] Edmonds' speech was the most radical of the day.[184]

> In what he was about to say he did not threaten the Lords – he had too much sense to do that. But for once he would become a prophet and he would say that if they refused this measure, they ought to take lessons of their dancing masters as soon as possible in order to qualify themselves for a situation on the continent – and that their ladies might with advantage, make a few experiments in the wash-house.[185]

Even with a jest to soften the tone, Edmonds was threatening a social as well as a political revolution with this implication that peers would lose property as well as titles. In line with this more radical stance, the Political Council decided that, should the Lords refuse, it would campaign for a more extensive reform.[186] Russell printed placards declaring 'No taxes paid here', which quickly went on display.[187] When the news of Grey's resignation on 9 May and Wellington's re-appointment arrived, the crisis deepened. With businesses at a standstill, the Council met in Great Charles

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[181] Jaffray, 'Hints for a History', XXVI, *BJ*, 2 January 1856; Langford, *A Century* Vol. 2, pp. 612-622; Dent, *Making of Birmingham*, pp. 357-365.
[182] Langford, *A Century,* Vol. 2, p. 613.
[183] BA&C 467724, *Report of the Proceedings of the Great Meeting of the Inhabitants of the Midland Districts held at Birmingham May 7th 1832 convened by the Council of the Political Union for the purpose of petitioning the House of Lords to pass the Reform Bill* (Birmingham, 1832).
[184] His comment at the beginning, that nature had given him a weak voice, gave rise to at least one obituary writer taking this at face value, but Edmonds' point was that he needed a voice to match the occasion.
[185] *MR,* 12 May 1832.
[186] Behagg, *Politics and Production*, p. 174.
[187] Moss, *Thomas Attwood*, p. 216.

Street, the streets around crammed with a crowd demanding an adjournment to Newhall Hill. Five hundred merchants and manufacturers came forward to join the Union.[188]

The *Report* of the 10 May meeting demonstrates the volatility and anger of the crowd and Edmonds' role in channelling that anger and maintaining the peace. He answered calls of 'What are we to do?' by urging the need to hold course: 'By your legal, peaceable and firm conduct, in the cause in which you are engaged, you will accomplish your political regeneration.' This again met with more calls of 'How long are we to live upon this?'[189] The petition that he presented was strongly worded, calling for the creation of peers, for the House of Commons to refuse supply if needed, and this clause:

> That your petitioners find it declared in the Bill of Rights that 'the people of England may have arms for their defence' (tremendous cheering which lasted for some minutes) and your petitioners apprehend that this right will be put into force generally and that the whole of the people of England will think it necessary to have arms for their defence in order that they may be prepared for any circumstances that may arise.[190]

This led Harriet Martineau to remark that: 'A petition which more plainly stated the intentions of its framers to have recourse to arms, was probably never presented to the House of Commons.'[191] Joseph Russell produced a one-sided version of the

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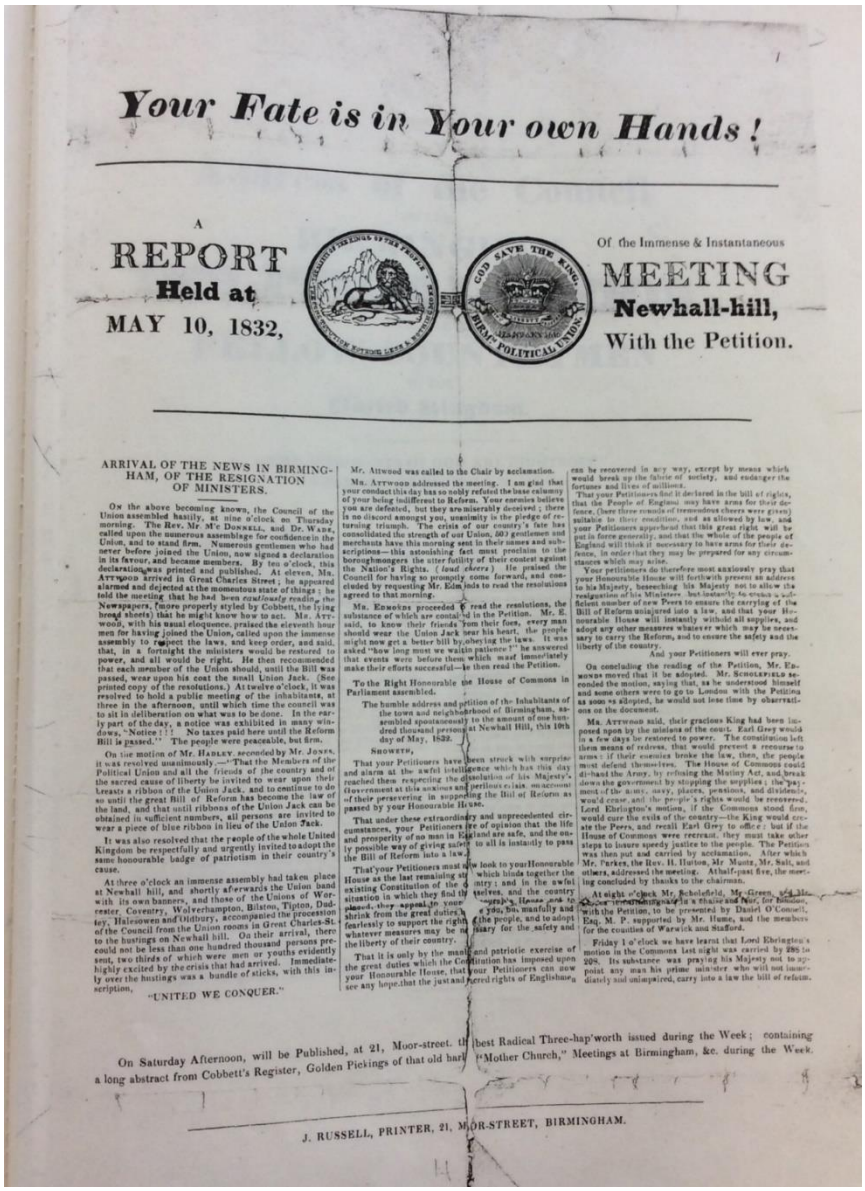
[188] Dent, *Old and New Birmingham: A History of the Town and its People*, Vols. 1-3 (Wakefield: E.P. Publishing, 1973 [1878-80]), pp. 409-410; Wakefield, *Life of Thomas Attwood,* pp. 192-196; Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 80-81; Moss, *Thomas Attwood*, p. 217; Fraser, *Perilous Question*, pp. 224-6.
[189] BA&C 60734, *Report of the Proceedings of the Public meeting of the Inhabitants of Birmingham held on Newhall Hill May 10th 1832* (Birmingham, 1832).
[190] *Report, May 10th 1832.*
[191] Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, p. 618.

Report of the meeting, which could be pasted as a broadsheet, headlined ‘Your Fate is in Your own Hands’ (Figure 6.2).[192]



Your Fate is in Your own Hands!

A REPORT Held at MAY 10, 1832,

Of the Immense & Instantaneous MEETING Newhall-hill, With the Petition.

ARRIVAL OF THE NEWS IN BIRMINGHAM, OF THE RESIGNATION OF MINISTERS.

On the above becoming known, the Council of the Union assembled hastily, at nine o'clock on Thursday morning. The Rev. Mr M'c DONNELL, and Dr. WADE, called upon the numerous assemblage for confidence in the Union, and to stand firm. Numerous gentlemen who had never before joined the Union, now signed a declaration in its favour, and became members. By ten o'clock, this declaration was printed and published. At eleven, Mr. ATTWOOD arrived in Great Charles Street; he appeared alarmed and dejected at the momentous state of things: he told the meeting that he had been cautiously reading the Newspapers, (more properly styled by Cobbett, the lying broad sheets) that he might know how to act. Mr. ATTWOOD, with his usual eloquence, praised the eleventh hour men for having joined the Union, called upon the immense assembly to respect the laws, and keep order, and said, that, in a fortnight the ministers would be restored to power, and all would be right. He then recommended that each member of the Union should, until the Bill was passed, wear upon his coat the small Union Jack. (See printed copy of the resolutions.) At twelve o'clock, it was resolved to hold a public meeting of the inhabitants, at three in the afternoon, until which time the council was to sit in deliberation on what was to be done. In the early part of the day, a notice was exhibited in many windows, "Notice!!! No taxes paid here until the Reform Bill is passed." The people were peaceable, but firm.

On the motion of Mr. HADLEY, seconded by Mr. JONES, it was resolved unanimously,—"That the Members of the Political Union and all the friends of the country and of the sacred cause of liberty be invited to wear upon their breasts a ribbon of the Union Jack, and to continue to do so until the great Bill of Reform has become the law of the land, and that until ribbons of the Union Jack can be obtained in sufficient numbers, all persons are invited to wear a piece of blue ribbon in lieu of the Union Jack."

It was also resolved that the people of the whole United Kingdom be respectfully and urgently invited to adopt the same honourable badge of patriotism in their country's cause.

At three o'clock an immense assembly had taken place at Newhall hill, and shortly afterwards the Union band with its own banners, and those of the Unions of Worcester, Coventry, Wolverhampton, Bilston, Tipton, Dudley, Halesowen and Oldbury, accompanied the procession of the Council from the Union rooms in Great Charles-St. to the hustings on Newhall hill. On their arrival, there could not be less than one hundred thousand persons present, two thirds of which were men or youths evidently highly excited by the crisis that had arrived. Immediately over the hustings was a bundle of sticks, with this inscription,

"UNITED WE CONQUER."

Mr. Attwood was called to the Chair by acclamation.

Mr. ATTWOOD addressed the meeting. I am glad that your conduct this day has so nobly refuted the base calumny of your being indifferent to Reform. Your enemies believe you are defeated, but they are miserably deceived; there is no discord amongst you, unanimity is the pledge of returning triumph. The crisis of our country's fate has consolidated the strength of our Union, 50 gentlemen and merchants have this morning sent in their names and subscriptions—this astonishing fact must proclaim to the boroughmongers the utter futility of their contest against the Nation's Rights. (*loud cheers*) He praised the Council for having so promptly come forward, and concluded by requesting Mr. EDMONDS to read the resolutions agreed to that morning.

Mr. EDMONDS proceeded to read the resolutions, the substance of which are contained in the Petition. Mr. E. said, to know their friends from their foes, every man should wear the Union Jack near his heart, the people might now get a better bill by obeying the laws. It was asked "how long must we watch patiently?" he answered that events were before them which must immediately make their efforts successful—he then read the Petition.

To the Right Honourable the House of Commons in Parliament assembled.

The humble address and petition of the Inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood of Birmingham, assembled spontaneously to the amount of one hundred thousand persons at Newhall Hill, this 10th day of May, 1832.

SHOWETH,

That your Petitioners have been struck with surprise and alarm at the awful intelligence which has this day reached them respecting the dissolution of his Majesty's Government at this anxious and perilous crisis, on account of their persevering in supporting the Bill of Reform as passed by your Honourable House.

That under these extraordinary and unprecedented circumstances, your Petitioners are of opinion that the life and prosperity of no man in England are safe, and the only possible way of giving safety to all is instantly to pass the Bill of Reform into a law.

That your Petitioners must now look to your Honourable House as the last remaining stay which binds together the existing Constitution of the country; and in the awful situation in which they find themselves, and the country placed, they appeal to your Honourable House, and to you, Sir, manfully and fearlessly to support the rights of the people, and to adopt whatever measures may be necessary for the safety and the liberty of their country.

That it is only by the manly and patriotic exercise of the great duties which the Constitution has imposed upon your Honourable House, that your Petitioners can now see any hope that the just and sacred rights of Englishmen can be recovered in any way, except by means which would break up the fabric of society, and endanger the fortunes and lives of millions.

That your Petitioners find it declared in the bill of rights, that the People of England may have arms for their defence, (here three rounds of tremendous cheers were given) suitable to their condition, and as allowed by law, and your Petitioners apprehend that this great right will be put in force generally, and that the whole of the people of England will think it necessary to have arms for their defence, in order that they may be prepared for any circumstances which may arise.

Your petitioners do therefore most anxiously pray that your Honourable House will forthwith present an address to his Majesty, beseeching his Majesty not to allow the resignation of his Ministers but instantly to create a sufficient number of new Peers to ensure the carrying of the Bill of Reform unimpaired into a law, and that your Honourable House will instantly withhold all supplies, and adopt any other measures whatever which may be necessary to carry the Reform, and to ensure the safety and the liberty of the country.

And your Petitioners will ever pray.

On concluding the reading of the Petition, Mr. EDMONDS moved that it be adopted. Mr. SCHOLEFIELD seconded the motion, saying that, as he understood himself and some others were to go to London with the Petition as soon as adopted, he would not lose time by observations on the document.

Mr. ATTWOOD said, their gracious King had been imposed upon by the minions of the court. Earl Grey would in a few days be restored to power. The constitution left them means of redress, that would prevent a recourse to arms: if their enemies broke the law, then, the people must defend themselves. The House of Commons could disband the Army, by refusing the Mutiny Act, and break down the government by stopping the supplies; the payment of the army, navy, places, pensions, and dividends, would cease, and the people's rights would be recovered. Lord Ebrington's motion, if the Commons stood firm, would cure the evils of the country—the King would create the Peers, and recall Earl Grey to office: but if the House of Commons were recreant, they must take other steps to insure speedy justice to the people. The Petition was then put and carried by acclamation. After which Mr. Parkes, the Rev. H. Hutton, Mr Muntz, Mr. Salt, and others, addressed the meeting. At half-past five, the meeting concluded by thanks to the chairman.

At eight o'clock Mr. Scholefield, Mr. Green, and Mr. Edmonds, left Birmingham in a chaise and four, for London, with the Petition, to be presented by Daniel O'Connell, Esq. M. P. supported by Mr. Hume, and the members for the counties of Warwick and Stafford.

Friday 1 o'clock we have learnt that Lord Ebrington's motion in the Commons last night was carried by 288 to 208. Its substance was praying his Majesty not to appoint any man his prime minister who will not immediately and unimpaired, carry into a law the bill of reform.

On Saturday Afternoon, will be Published, at 21, Moor-street, the best Radical Three-hap'worth issued during the Week; containing a long abstract from Cobbett's Register, Golden Pickings of that old hard "Mother Church," Meetings at Birmingham, &c. during the Week.

J. RUSSELL, PRINTER, 21, MOOR-STREET, BIRMINGHAM.

<u>Figure 6.2</u> Broadsheet: ‘Your Fate is in Your own Hands’

This crisis lasted several more days with the Political Council in near-permanent session, frequent parades, Harborne villagers guarding Attwood’s house at night,

[192] BA&C 151425, *Report of the Immense and Instantaneous meeting Held at Newhall Hill, May 10th 1832 with the petition* (Birmingham, 1832).

each member of the Council nominating a deputy in case arrests took place, and Polish exile Count Czapski acting as an advisor.[193] Frederick Hill was taken onto the Political Council and organised public readings of the newspapers: 'The working men were now content to remain quietly at their employment during the daytime, instead of leaving it to seek for news.'[194] Alexander Somerville (1811–1885) of the Scots Greys later gave an account of the orders to 'rough-sharpen' swords but also of fraternisation between BPU members and the soldiers.[195] Some of the troops organised anonymous letters which were sent to people in authority or dropped in the streets. These made clear that while they would act against riots, they would not attack a planned peaceful march to London.[196] The crisis was resolved when, on 16 May, the news arrived in Birmingham that Grey had been reinstated. Plans for a thanksgiving meeting on Newhall Hill were hastily organised, Attwood was collected by a party of Union members from Harborne and paraded into Birmingham, and bells rang through the town[197] At this spontaneous meeting Edmonds, who had been in tears earlier, applauded the fact that the disposition to employ force if required had not been wanting – two gentlemen had visited him early in the morning saying that 1500 individuals were under arms – but that it was 'delightful to find that this alternative is not now to be dreaded'.[198]

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[193] Wakefield, *Life of Thomas Attwood,* pp. 193-4; Langford, *A Century* Vol. 2, p. 619. The parallel London events including drillings, parades and Francis Place's launch of the 'To Stop the Duke, go for Gold' campaign, are covered by Brock, Pearce and Fraser amongst others.
[194] F. Hill, *Autobiography of Fifty Years in times of Reform*, pp. 92-94.
[195] J. Hamburger, 'Somerville, Alexander (1811–1885), journalist and soldier', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-2601 (accessed 12 July 2020).
[196] Dent, *Old and New,* Vol. 2, p. 411; A. Somerville, *The Autobiography of a Working Man* (London: MacGibbon and Kee), pp. 163-165.
[197] Wakefield, *Life of Thomas Attwood,* pp. 209-210; Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, p. 620; Dent, *Old and New,* Vol. 2, pp. 412-3; F. Hill, *Autobiography of Fifty Years in times of Reform,* p. 97.
[198] Wakefield, *Life of Thomas Attwood,* p. 213.

To what extent was Attwood 'riding the tiger' – as Behagg suggests – that is, were the BPU leaders operating on the back of a popular base that they might not be able to control?[199] Even Moss, who considers that there was a strong bluff element in the October crisis, suggests that Attwood and the Council were under mass pressure in May. They were able to keep discipline, but further intransigence at Westminster would have brought disorder.[200] The evidence of the numbers of armed supporters, the presence kept up in the streets in the May crisis, the rumours of a march on London and fraternisation with the Scots Greys all suggest that the BPU leadership would have been forced to act or been swept aside, had the King and the Lords not conceded. But was an alternative programme available that could lead to anything more than disorder? The second part of Behagg's argument is that a much more radical programme existed. Attwood was pushed into revolutionary rhetoric partly by the popularity of that programme. Behagg is able to point to the radical tradition and the criticisms of the Bill kept up by the *Midland Representative*, even while it supported the campaign for the Bill.[201] He concedes, however, that Attwood retained the loyalty of the rank-and-file and was helped by the strong belief that the Bill would be a first step towards reform and improvement.[202]

Edmonds was an essential partner in holding together the coalition of the BPU, using his political influence, his organising experience, and his preparedness to compromise. As an individual, with a known history of sacrifice, Edmonds was critical in bringing those supporting the traditional radical programme towards the BPU and in building its mass base. On several occasions, in May 1830 and in the spring of

[199] Behagg, *Politics and Production,* pp. 158 – 183 and *Labour and Reform: Working-Class Movements 1815-1914* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), pp. 27-32.
[200] Moss, *Thomas Attwood*, pp. 223-4.
[201] Behagg, *Politics and Production,* pp. 170-175.
[202] Behagg, *Politics and Production,* pp. 169-170.

1831 when faced with the Whig government's Reform Bill, his was a significant voice arguing that the radical movement should support these limited measures. He was prepared to countenance the use of defensive force, within constitutional limits. The resolution of the October and May crises meant that this stance was not put to the test, but his words would be remembered in later arguments.

Edmonds, the BPU and his reputation and status

Edmonds had partially recovered his position in the town by the end of the 1820s, but sections of the town's elite and press remained hostile to him and he continued to face difficulties in his professional life. His experience in the BPU was to change his position for the better, and this section examines why that was and the limits to that improvement. It does this by evaluating two episodes, Edmonds' quarrel with Joseph Allday, publisher of the *Monthly Argus,* and the dispute over who should be nominated as a candidate to be one of Birmingham's first MPs.

For Edmonds, membership of the BPU Political Council, and Attwood's reliance on him, increased his status in the town. He was a platform speaker or chairman at all the major meetings organised by the BPU. His previous history as a reform agitator who had served nine months in jail was now transformed from a drawback into an advantage. He became the friend or acquaintance of the gentlemen in Attwood's currency circle, such as lamp manufacturer Salt, silversmith Charles Jones, and the metal manufacturer G.F. Muntz. Meanwhile, his long-standing association with the Hill family and with W. Hawkes Smith gave him continued access to the radical Unitarian middle class. He was involved with sympathetic newspapers, including the *Birmingham Journal* and the *Midland Representative* and its editor, Bronterre O'Brien. His collaboration with the Unitarian lawyer and radical Joseph Parkes lasted

throughout the period, for example, in the campaign over the future of the Free Grammar School.[203] Perhaps most significant for Edmonds was their joint attack on Joseph Allday and his satirical newspaper, the *Monthly Argus*.

Asa Briggs called the *Argus* 'one of the most extraordinary publications which has ever appeared in any city at any time'. The *Birmingham*, then *Monthly Argus and Public Censor*, was published from 1828 to 1834, at first as a weekly, but from 1829 onwards as a monthly magazine. There are no circulation figures, but its very survival testifies to the popularity of its diet of local news, literary comment and scandal: 'Tory–Radical in politics, vigorously anti-Catholic and anti-Dissent in religion, the *Argus* revelled in vituperation.'[204] The owner of the *Argus* was Joseph Allday, a Tory and a loyalist, especially hostile to the Whig 'cabal' around Parkes and Redfern. Allday was not against all reform: like many Tory-radicals he was a supporter of humanitarian improvements but disliked any form of change that challenged the established social order. He endorsed the Political Union in its early days but abandoned this position as the Union became more assertive and took up wider radical causes.

Edmonds became a favourite target, the charges being that he was not a gentleman yet had pretensions to be a lawyer, was a convicted felon who now moved in respectable society and was nothing but a demagogue. The *Argus* nicknamed him 'Munchausen' after the fictitious loud and blustering German baron. In a column

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[203] Parkes did not join the BPU but helped to write speeches and liaised with radicals and Whigs in London, especially during the crisis moments of Autumn 1831 and the 'Days of May', BA&C Birmingham Institutions, Vol. 2, Pt.1 'Political Union', MS note by Parkes inserted**;** Buckley, *Joseph Parkes,* pp. 73-98.

[204] Briggs, 'Press and Public', p. 120. The following paragraphs draw on S. Thomas, '"One of the Most Extraordinary Publications Which Has Ever Appeared..": George Edmonds, v. the Monthly Argus' in I. Cawood and L. Peters (eds.), *Print, Politics and the Provincial Press in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), pp. 57-80.

entitled ‘Lies of the Day’ it declared: ‘It was not true that GE has had a full-length portrait of himself taken – for the purpose of handing down to posterity the form and fashion of his tremendous cloak. It is not true that this fat Narcissus of 50 sleeps in said cloak.’ [205] Edmonds had just turned 42, was perhaps putting on weight and trying to dress for the court rather than the schoolroom, so Allday’s comments were probably close enough to be annoying, but he was used to attacks and, as J. W. Showell put it, ‘none too tender-tongued himself’.[206] However, by late 1830, the *Monthly Argus* had changed its tone and sharpened its practice. It made suggestions about the private lives of various Birmingham families, including women, which posed a serious threat to reputations. Worse, there was evidence that individuals were being blackmailed. Parkes and Edmonds challenged Allday at the Town’s Meeting in December 1830. Then came an attack that Edmonds could not ignore: the *Argus* accused him of cheating on a poor woman hawker when he was a young teacher in Blockley.[207] Edmonds and Parkes went to court, accusing Allday of libel. Matthew Hill, representing Edmonds, was at pains to establish his respectable character. Edmonds was seeking a career in the law late in life: ‘It was no dishonour to impute a political character to him. But this article exposed his private character.’ Hill and Parkes successfully proved the libel cases and Allday was jailed for ten months.[208]

Edmonds won, but at considerable cost to his health and finances. His ego and audacity had allowed him to bring forward a case where others had shied away from

[205] *Monthly Argus*, Vol. 1, June 1830, p. 519. In a column that compared Birmingham individuals with types of bird, Edmonds was labelled a bullfinch, suggesting vanity or self-importance, *Monthly Argus,* Vol. 2, No. 2, August 1830, p. 59.
[206] *Showell’s Dictionary of Birmingham*, p. 173.
[207] See Chapter Three.
[208] *BJ*, 9 April 1831.

the prospect of Allday's slurs being discussed publicly. After the trial, the *Birmingham Journal* expressed 'the obligation of the inhabitants to those gentlemen who have fearlessly come forward to expose this monster of calumny and malignant slander'.[209] A letter in *Aris's Gazette* described Edmonds as 'a laborious, indefatigable and disinterested servant of the town' who was facing heavy loss from his challenge to 'that disgusting monthly publication'.[210] A meeting of the 'Friends of George Edmonds' took place on 23 April 1831 at the Globe Tavern at which Reverend McDonnell successfully proposed:

> That Mr George Edmonds, by his superior talents, by the tried integrity, the intrepid spirit, and the persevering industry with which he has for a long series of years devoted himself to the great cause of public liberty, and more especially to the rights, privileges and welfare of his fellow townsmen, has established a just claim to their approbation and esteem.[211]

While some of the donations to this testimonial might have been in response to his campaigning work for the BPU, others probably expressed the gratitude of neighbours who had been relieved from Allday's attentions.

Edmonds had become a recognised figure in town life, his position enhanced by his activity in the BPU, illustrated by a medal that was amongst the commemorative objects or 'Reform Ware' which celebrated the successful campaign (Figure 6.3).[212]

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[209] *BJ*, 9 April 1831.
[210] *ABG,* 21 March 1831.
[211] *ABG,* 16 May 1831.
[212] BM M166 Bronze Medal. Obverse, draped bust of George Edmonds, bare head, left; reverse, three inscribed scrolls on pedestal, above which an inscribed stone with shamrocks, thistles and roses around, designed by Joseph Davis, 1832; see Figure 6.3.

Figure 6. 3 Bronze Commemorative Medal. Courtesy of British Museum, BM M166

The medal shows Edmonds with a classically heroic profile, which contrasts with the impression given by other descriptions of him. George Holyoake described him as having 'the protruding underlip, the physical sign of capacity for oratory'.[213] Less flattering were suggestions that he resembled a frog, because of his large mouth.[214]

Despite the recognition accorded Edmonds, there was a limit to how far he could rise. After the Great Reform Act had been passed, the Political Union members discussed who should be the candidates for the two newly-created Birmingham seats. Attwood was a natural choice, and the Political Council decided that Joshua Scholefield should be the second candidate. The context to this is not clear although it is possible to speculate about the possible reasons and class prejudices that led the Council to overlook Edmonds. He accepted the decision at the time but when Scholefield's wife fell ill, and Scholefield withdrew, Edmonds put himself forward. However, Mrs Scholefield recovered and Scholefield stepped forward to claim the nomination again. A sharp exchange of letters followed and Edmonds issued a public notice:

> The public shall know the whole of the treatment which I have received from Mr Scholefield; and the electors will then judge of the honour of that Gentleman who has dared to make me appear to announce to the Electors of this Borough a purpose of resigning, when he knew that I had declared that nothing should induce me to give way to him, after receiving from him the most insulting treatment.[215]

[213] G. Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1906), p. 31.
[214] E. Preston, 'Politicians and Peculiars of Old Birmingham', *Birmingham Daily Gazette,* 28 November 1908.
[215] BA&C 65713, *Copy of Mr Edmonds's Placard, June 30th 1832*.

Scholefield was the eventual candidate, but, according to Moss, 'relations were so soured that Scholefield withdrew from the Council'.[216] The episode showed the limitation to Edmonds' progress within the BPU: Attwood and friends might recognise Edmonds' contribution but sending him to Westminster as a representative of the town was a step too far.

Edmonds was an essential partner in the BPU. He, and his fellow radicals, were able to bring their experience and a mass base into Attwood's coalition. His past reputation now played to his advantage. He acted as a conduit for the concerns of the rank-and-file members of the BPU and participated in the interventions in town political life. A striking aspect of this period is the diversity of thought and activity and the phenomenal energy the radicals showed. Edmonds fell seriously ill at least once and suffered financially. His reputation and status, however, were enhanced.

Despite the occasional clashes and feuds, Edmonds was a conciliator in the political arena, something born out of his own experience and confirmed by the events of the 1830-32 campaign. Contemporary radical thought influenced his ideas but he retained his belief in the traditional popular radical programme. His compromises within the BPU arose both from his perception that those of more influence had to be kept in the coalition, and his belief that it was worth obtaining the restricted reforms contained within the 1832 Act. Close co-thinkers were also prepared to support the various Reform Bills despite scepticism. The contradictions and consequences of this approach are explored in the next chapter.

[216] BA&C 65713, *Mr Edmonds' Statement, July 10th 1832;* Moss, *Thomas Attwood*, pp. 228-9.

Chapter Seven

TWO CHARTERS: EDMONDS, THE BIRTH OF CHARTISM IN BIRMINGHAM AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF CORPORATE STATUS, 1833-1840

By 1833 Edmonds had achieved a degree of respectability that he might not have expected a decade earlier. His reputation as a radical leader was assured: his past activities as an agitator could now be seen through the prism of the successful campaign of the BPU. He had taken on a reputational challenge from Joseph Allday and earned the thanks of others who had been the object of the unwelcome attention of the *Monthly Argus*. He had a position as an Attorney's Clerk and was able to practise in the local courts even if he still faced the hostility of the Birmingham Law Society (BLS). In the decade that followed he lost his position as a radical leader, experienced personal and political insecurity, but secured a position as Clerk of the Peace to the new borough. This chapter considers Edmonds' interaction with the political and social changes in the town in the 1830s, his political trajectory, and whether his actions were motivated by personal ambition or political principle.

Birmingham's population, industry and transport expanded in the 1830s.[1] The inner town grew, more courts were built, and inequalities increased in housing and living conditions. The Town Hall and Market Hall were erected at the behest of the Street Commissioners but the pavements and roads were in a literally uneven state and sanitation remained poor in overcrowded areas.[2] Workshop production remained

[1] E. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town: Birmingham and the Industrial Revolution* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), p. 119. The population expanded from 146,986 in 1831 to 182,922 in 1841.
[2] C. Gill, *History of Birmingham Vol.1, Manor and Borough to 1865* (London: OUP, 1952) pp.320-327; Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town,* pp.120-2. Donna Taylor has recently pointed out that the Street Commissioners organised effective street cleaning and that sanitation was generally better than in other manufacturing towns. However, this does not negate Hopkins' observations about the

predominant overall although in the metal industries mass-production methods were being gradually introduced, such as in pin-making.[3] Fiona Terry-Chandler found that women workers, paid at lower rates, were preferred by employers in some of the changing trades and that there was an intensification of work in 'hidden' areas of outwork employing women and children.[4] Clive Behagg argues that despite the continuing predominance of workshop production, there was an increasing polarisation between larger employers and small masters, with the former being able to use credit and marketing more effectively, increasing pressures on the small master.[5] In a period of trade expansion, the negative impact of these changes on working families might not be felt; however, Birmingham, despite its differences with the northern towns, was not immune from the effects of the business cycle. After a mid-decade period of recovery and prosperity, distress returned in 1837.[6]

The history of political developments in Birmingham in this decade is contested. R. K. Dent's and J.A. Langford's contemporary histories established a distinct view of political events and divisions in Birmingham in the period of early Chartism (1838-40). Langford, a Liberal naturally sympathetic to the leadership of the Birmingham Political Union, acknowledged the growth of support for physical-force Chartism and related it partly to economic distress but mostly to 'dangerous counsels':

> The motto of the Political Union, 'Peace, Law and Order', was despised by the more violent and foolish leaders of this new political

differences between districts; D. Taylor, *Governance and Locality in the Age of Reform: Birmingham, 1769-1852* (Unpub. PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2017), pp. 54-7.

[3] Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town,* pp. 49-55.

[4] F. Terry-Chandler, *Women, Work and the Family in Birmingham 1800-1870* (Unpub. PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1995).

[5] Behagg, C., 'Custom, class and change: the trade societies of Birmingham', *Social History,* Vol. 4, No. 3 (October 1979), pp. 455-480, p. 465.

[6] Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town*, p. 77.

> crusade. The banner which had led to such glorious results in 1832 was ignominiously trampled in the dust, and 'arms, arms, arms,' was now the cry of the infatuated and deluded people.[7]

Dent likewise referred to a new doctrine '...being insidiously taught by a few earnest but misguided men, disclaiming the old watchwords of the union and proclaiming that the people were justified in obtaining their rights by physical force'.[8]

This view that the events of 1838-9 were an aberration in a town otherwise characterised by class cooperation is followed by Trygve Tholfsen. However, Asa Briggs, who is perhaps at his least 'Briggsian' in his coverage of the Chartist period in Birmingham, acknowledges the sharpness of divisions and discusses how the social tensions, economic challenges and working-class responses of the 1830s fed into the new movement.[9] Clive Behagg, giving most weight to structural changes in the workplace, charts the growth of diverging interests between working-class and middle-class leaders, while Carlos Flick considers that the BPU leadership were naïve in thinking that their model of cooperation between the 'industrious classes' would hold.[10] Donna Taylor argues that the drive for and achievement of municipal status was a vital factor in the divisions that arose in the town.[11] This chapter assesses whether Edmonds' experience can illuminate this long-running debate through considering his participation in a variety of campaigns in the 1830s and his

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[7] J. Langford, *A Century of Birmingham Life: or a Chronicle of Local Events from 1741-1841, Vol. 2* (Birmingham: E.C. Osborne, 1868), p. 635.
[8] R. Dent, *The Making of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Allday, 1894), pp. 367-371.
[9] T. Tholfsen, 'The Chartist Crisis in Birmingham', *International Review of Social History,* 3 (1958), pp. 461-480; A. Briggs, 'Political and Administrative History: Political History from 1832' in W. Stephens (ed.), *A History of the County of Warwick,* Volume Seven, Victoria County History (London, 1964), pp. 298-317; Briggs, *Chartist Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 19-28.
[10] C. Behagg, 'An Alliance with the Middle Class: The Birmingham Political Union and Early Chartism', in J. Epstein and D. Thompson (eds.), *The Chartist Experience* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 57-86; C. Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union and the Movements for Reform in Britain 1830-39* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1978), pp. 147-174.
[11] Taylor, *Governance and Locality in the Age of Reform.*

role in the split in Birmingham Chartism, asking whether he was caught in the middle of an inevitable rupture. It examines his motives, considering whether he sold his radical soul to gain preferment, as suggested by Chartist critics, or whether his long-held views meant that he could not find a place in the new movement.

Eliezer Edwards' account outlines Edmonds' appointment as Clerk of the Peace but is silent on his participation in early Chartism.[12] The local press is the main primary source for the political events and campaigns of the mid-1830s and the revival of the BPU. The *Birmingham Journal,* edited by R. K. Douglas, continued to give support to radical aims, in particular the creation of a new Corporation.[13] Its reports of Political Union meetings are sympathetic to the BPU leadership. The details given in these reports make them useful for tracking disputes but cannot give the full flavour of the arguments that must have been in progress in informal settings. Accounts assembled in the *Lovett Collection* along with those in the radical press, for example, the *Northern Star*, provide alternative voices, but the discussions held by working-class organisations such as the Memorial Committee in 1837 and the Rent Committee of 1838-9 have to be inferred from the actions and speeches of leading individuals.[14]

The chapter's first section considers the range of radical activities in the mid-1830s and considers how Edmonds navigated the fast-changing political landscape. The second explores how different elements of the previous coalition of the BPU, including Edmonds, acted once the relatively benign conditions of the mid-1830s

[12] E. Edwards, 'George Edmonds', *Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men* (Birmingham, 1877). Edwards' account of the Bull Ring riots, also collected in his 'Personal Recollections', does not cover events in Birmingham Chartism before its split.
[13] For R. K. Douglas, see Appendix C.
[14] BA&C MS 753, *Lovett Collection*, Vol. 2 (Parts One and Two). This is a collection of correspondence and papers of the Chartist, William Lovett.

gave way to recession. The third and fourth sections examine Edmonds' role in the split in Birmingham Chartism, his illness, appointment as Clerk of the Peace, and defence of Chartist prisoners.

Radical campaigns in Birmingham in the mid-1830s

For those radicals who had been involved in the campaign for the 1832 Reform Act in the political and social coalition of the BPU, the period that followed brought a different experience. The mid-1830s were a time of diverse causes and shifting alliances. Moderate Tories around Peel began to call themselves Conservatives, while 'Liberal' came to refer to moderate Whigs.[15] What Linda Colley has called the 'immense anger' of those who had been excluded from the political nation fed into campaigns to build trades unions and then into opposition to the New Poor Law.[16] At a local level, there was also a state of political flux. Roger Ward suggests that working-class members of the BPU concentrated on their specific interests while the middle-class members of the Union were 'thrown into disarray' by its collapse. The BPU agreed to suspend itself in June 1834.[17] 'Disarray' is perhaps too strong a term, given the variety of activities and causes into which individuals could throw their time and energy, but it is true that Edmonds, P. H. Muntz (1811-1888)**,** and Benjamin Hadley (1791-1843?) appeared frustrated with the shutting down of the Union and keen to re-launch it at several points between 1834 and 1837.[18] For example, in

[15] Ward, *City-State and Nation: Birmingham's Political History 1830-32* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2005), p. 34.
[16] J. Belchem, *Popular Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 64-66; L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* Revised ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 356.
[17] Ward, *City-State and Nation*, p. 34; Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union*, p. 109.
[18] For P. H. Muntz and Benjamin Hadley, see Appendix C.

Edmonds' speech supporting Attwood in the elections of January 1835, he suggested that the Political Union was 'reposing not sleeping'.[19]

Donna Taylor has traced the 'intense political rivalry' that marked the campaign for and against incorporation.[20] She sees the divisions that emerged as primarily ideological ones between Tory defenders of church and state and the radical opposition. The church rate question is seen as part of these rivalries.[21] This account is helpful in explaining the emergence of two camps and the way in which the questions of incorporation, the People's Charter, and Attwood's need for support for his currency proposals, promoted the revival and growth of the BPU.[22] Taylor possibly underplays the role of the dissenting lobby, the shifting nature of alliances and the place of working-class pressure in the revival of the political reform movement. Examining Edmonds' part in the events and campaigns of the mid-1830s can test the appropriateness of the judgements of historians.

Edmonds was prominent in the campaign to abolish church rates. The payment of levies to cover the maintenance of parish churches was a long-standing source of dissenting grievance.[23] In 1827 Edmonds commented at a Vestry meeting that the levy of 9d would fall very heavily on poor families, but pressed no further.[24] The turning point came in the early 1830s, both in the town and nationally. Dissenters saw the campaigns for political and ecclesiastical reform as interlinked aspects of the struggle for civil equality. Jacob Ellens suggests that the issue of church rates

[19] BA&C 123646, *Birmingham Election: Triumph of Reform* (Birmingham: J. Webb, 1835).
[20] Taylor, *Governance and Locality in the Age of Reform,* pp. 134-135.
[21] Taylor, *Governance and Locality in the Age of Reform,* pp. 146-8.
[22] Taylor*, Governance and Locality in the Age of Reform,* pp. 175-176.
[23] J. Ellens, *The Religious Routes to Gladstonian Liberalism: The Church Rate Conflict in England and Wales 1832-1868* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1994), pp.10-11. All those levied for poor rates were also liable for church rates.
[24] *BJ,* 3 September 1825; *BJ,* 16 June 1827.

became part of a wider religious divide that framed political conflict in urban constituencies, even overtaking economic grievances.[25] To what extent was this true in Birmingham?

In 1830, Joseph Russell and Edmonds campaigned for better scrutiny of the churchwardens' accounts and there was 'noisy partisanship' at the Vestry meeting in December 1830 before a 6d rate was agreed.[26] From 1831 onwards, BPU Political Council members, including Anglicans G.F. Muntz and Joshua Scholefield, joined the campaign.[27] This combination of dissenter resentment and radical challenge to the old Tory elite meant that throughout the 1830s, the attempt to levy a church rate 'was the cause of much excitement and many indecorous scenes'.[28] An attempt by Edmonds to find a compromise in 1831 failed.[29] This was the last chance for any such proposal because expectations of change were high after the passing of the Reform Act. In December 1834 the churchwardens organised a meeting in the Town Hall, perhaps hoping for calm reflection and a favourable result, but the dissenting population turned out in force to oppose a rate. The Rector tried to avoid a show of hands, Edmonds managed to take one, and the churchwardens were overwhelmingly defeated.[30] The pro-church party could also be noisy and partisan: cries of 'No Popery' from the church party greeted a speech by Reverend McDonnell

[25] Ellens, *Religious Routes,* p.1.
[26] *BJ,* 17 April, 11 September, 11 December 1830; *ABG*, 6 December 1830.
[27] R. Cowherd, *The Politics of English Dissent: The Religious Aspects of Liberal and Humanitarian Reform Movements from 1815 to 1848* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), pp. 64-74; D. Moss, *Thomas Attwood: the Biography of a Radical* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1990), pp. 190-191. For other reform initiatives in the town joined by Political Council members, see Chapter Six.
[28] Langford, *A Century,* Vol. 2*,* p. 491.
[29] *ABG,* 18 July 1831. Edmonds proposed a 4d rate but allies such as Pare and Hadley would not support this compromise.
[30] BA&C 477730, *Church Rate: Full Report of the Great Meeting in the Town Hall on Friday December 5th 1834* (Birmingham: Joseph Webb, 1834). The subsequent poll result was 1,723 for the rate and 6,699 against (Dent, *Making of Birmingham,* p. 407).

in 1836.[31] In neighbouring Aston parish the balance of forces was different: vestry meetings returned a majority for the rate and when a number of people refused to pay in 1836, their goods were distrained.[32] Edmonds, representing them, attended the sale of goods at the Lamp Tavern, Deritend, and his speech included a strong appeal to dissenting principles, suggesting that their struggle 'would decide whether the Christian religion would be ministered to the people in accordance with the spirit of its divine founder or whether it was to be disgraced by such an unjust and unholy exaction…'[33] He may have sought a compromise in 1831 but, when lines were drawn, he supported his dissenting and radical allies.

The Easter Vestry Meeting at St Martin's of 28 March 1837 was the most dramatic and violent in the history of the campaign – although the extent of the violence was disputed. There was a great crush inside and the pro-church-rates lobby protested at behaviour which violated the sanctity of the church. In response, Edmonds called in vain for order but pointed out that the Rector should have agreed to meet in the Town Hall.[34] The Rector tried to run a poll inside the church using his own stewards.[35] At this point accounts diverge.[36] Eliezer Edwards, summarising the events later, reported that the panelling of the Rector's pew was smashed to atoms and Muntz was seen brandishing his well-known stick, while one of the Rector's supporters made threatening gesticulations: 'In fact, the whole proceeding was a

[31] *ABG,* 11 April 1836. Edmonds once again appeared to look for a compromise, although his suggestion that the church party's own nominees could pledge not to collect a rate might have been disingenuous.
[32] *BJ,* 8 March 1834, 17 September 1836.
[33] *BJ,* 17 September 1836. Although Edmonds appealed to Christian sentiment, he attended the event alongside Mr Aaron, who was Jewish, perhaps illustrating the broad coalition against the established Church.
[34] *BJ,* 1 April 1837.
[35] *BJ,* 1 April 1837.
[36] *BJ,* 1 April 1837, *ABG*, 3 April 1837. According to the *Journal*, Pare tried to examine the vestry books and the Rector's party rushed towards Pare, whereas the *Gazette* reported that Muntz and Pierce forced themselves into the Rector's pew before the police were called.

disgraceful brawl.'[37] The Rector's supporters subsequently laid a charge against Muntz, Pare, Trow and Pierce for an alleged riot.[38] A campaign was launched to support the defendants with donations raised by small plebeian clubs as well as better-off donors, with £200, for example, coming from the Working-men's Committee.[39] The church rates question shows a Birmingham sharply divided: it may not have been the decisive issue in the developing rift between the radical-liberal and Tory interests but it was an integral component. Edmonds, although looking for compromise at various points, or at least better behaviour, was a firm opponent of the rate and a leading figure in the campaign.[40]

The administration of the Poor Law also created conflict although agitation against it in Birmingham did not reach the intensity experienced in the northern counties. The Birmingham Guardians were able to preserve the Birmingham Poor Law Union and avoided an imposed re-organisation under the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act.[41] At the same time, the social and economic structure of Birmingham, the existence of a variety of trades and the activities of friendly societies, helped to prevent or alleviate intense poverty.[42] For a period in the mid-1830s there were no able-bodied inmates in the Parish Workhouse.[43] There was, however, a long tradition of hostility to the Poor Law in the town, as Eric Hopkins notes: 'The relieving officers were the last

[37] Edwards, 'G.F. Muntz M.P.' *Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men* (Birmingham, 1877).
[38] *BJ,* 22 April 1837. The *Journa*l states that those making the affidavits were Tories**.**
[39] *BJ,* 3 June 1837, 7, 14 and 21 April 1838, 9 February 1839. Edwards, 'G.F. Muntz M.P'. Most of the charges were thrown out by the jury in March 1838, although Muntz and Pare were found guilty of an affray. The Church finally abandoned its attempts to set a rate after mustering only 42 votes in 1842.
[40] The fact that Edmonds was not indicted over the 1837 Vestry affair suggests that he may not have been directly involved in the affray – his Tory opponents would undoubtedly have named him if they thought they had evidence.
[41] C. Upton, *The Birmingham Parish Workhouse 1730-1840* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2019), p. 37.
[42] Hopkins, *Rise of the Manufacturing Town,* pp. 154-155.
[43] Upton, *The Birmingham Parish Workhouse*, p. 37.

persons to be approached in time of need.'[44] A particular target was the forced labour for those applying to the Parish, especially the visible practice of wheeling sand from the extraction site at Key Hill to the canal. Both the radical *Birmingham Journal* and the Tory-radical *Monthly Argus* objected to the practice.[45] Edmonds also railed against the 'Key Hill slavery' at a Newhall Hill meeting in July 1832.[46] This might seem surprising, given that he had been elected onto the Guardians in 1831, with the support of fellow BPU members, and therefore was partly responsible for the very system he was criticising.[47] However, by then he knew that the system was on the way out – the Guardians had already begun to wind down the Key Hill enterprise as unviable and an embarrassment.[48] With Henry Knight, Edmonds also helped to put an end to Guardians' lavish 'tea-drinking' at the rate-payers' expense.[49]

None of these measures, however, could prevent the system being put under pressure when a recession in the summer of 1837 hit 'with remarkable speed and ferocity'; applications for relief rocketed from 219 in mid-May to 733 in mid-June and numbers in the workhouse rose.[50] The belt-tightening practised by the Guardians came up against the reality of mass distress. In the winter of 1838, the Guardians and the Relief Committee squabbled over how to proceed and who was eligible, even attempting to exclude Irish claimants at one point.[51] On 17 February Edmonds successfully proposed that the Guardians should attend to any case recommended

[44] Hopkins, *Rise of the Manufacturing Town,* pp. 156-7.
[45] Upton, *Birmingham Parish Workhouse,* pp. 103-107.
[46] BA&C 442207, *Report of the Proceedings of the Third Annual Gen meeting of the BPU held at Newhall Hill on Monday July 30th 1832 to elect the council for the ensuing year and to consider the extreme distress of the times and the wretched condition of Poland* (Birmingham, 1832), p. 6.
[47] *ABG*, 4 April 1831. He was later elected directly in 1834 and 1837. (*ABG*, 7 April 1834; *BJ,* 29 April 1837).
[48] Upton, *Birmingham Parish Workhouse*, pp. 106-9. The Key Hill site was transferred for use as the new Cemetery and this itself provided work.
[49] Upton, *Birmingham Parish Workhouse*, p. 100.
[50] Upton, *Birmingham Parish Workhouse*, p. 38.
[51] *BJ*, 10 February 1838; Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 99-100.

to them.[52] However, there was no long-term satisfactory solution; criticisms of the Guardians continued and they in turn protested that they could not ask ratepayers for more. Edmonds, a long-standing critic of Birmingham's Poor Law administration, was confronted as a Guardian with the real difficulties of administering the system, balancing a commitment to economy with the pressure for relief. He tried to provide practical solutions but could not find a remedy for distress at the same time as restricting rate demands. His previous programme, aligned to that of popular radicalism, combined opposition to waste and corruption with helping the poor, but could not meet the needs of the day.

Edmonds continued to support other radical and liberal causes in this decade. The campaign for the abolition of slavery focused on putting an end to the apprenticeship scheme. Despite the continuation of the 'England First' strain of thought, against which Edmonds had spoken in 1833, most radicals supported the campaign for total abolition along with most representatives of the churches.[53] At a Town Hall meeting in 1835, Edmonds attacked the apprenticeship scheme and the compensation paid to owners. Showing an understanding of both the sympathies and resentments felt by his audience, he rejected the idea that everyone should participate in guilt: 'The people so far from participating in the crime were willing to make any sacrifice to remove the evil; and hence their tacit consent to such lavish expenditure.'[54] Although there is no record of any Edmonds family members in the 'Female Society', which was central in the Birmingham abolitionist movement, it is likely that they were

[52] *BJ*, 10 February 1838, 17 February 1838.
[53] See Chapter Six.
[54] BA&C, 129682, *Report of the Proceedings of the Great Anti-slavery Meeting held at the Town Hall Birmingham on Wednesday Oct 14th 1835* (Birmingham, 1835); *BJ,* 17 October 1835; C. Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 316.

involved, as members of the Bond Street Chapel, in supporting the Baptist churches in Jamaica and the anti-apprenticeship agitation.[55] The Bond Street congregation participated in the celebrations of 1 and 2 August 1838 after the apprenticeship scheme was finally abolished. Children from the Baptist and Lancastrian schools led by Joseph Sturge (1793-1859) processed from the Town Hall to lay the foundations of a new school at Heneage Street.[56] Catherine Hall notes that at the Town Hall meeting: 'Radical and moderate liberal opinion jostled on the platform.'[57] Edmonds celebrated what 'pressure from without' had achieved but also reminded his audience of the work needed to improve the lot of 'white slaves' at home.[58] If on an earlier occasion he had insisted on defending the abolitionist cause against 'England First' attacks, he was also prepared to challenge the complacency of the liberal elite.

For many of the middle-class supporters of the BPU the priority was the creation of a borough with municipal powers; this became a focus for an uneasy alliance between the BPU leadership and the Whigs, both nationally and locally. Attwood was disappointed in the Whig governments, but Edmonds considered the Tories were always the worse option.[59] However, he remained publicly wary: in a speech in August 1835, defending the Municipal Reform Bill against threatened amendments in the Lords, he criticised the Tories, invoked the spirit of the 'three glorious days' of

[55] BA&C MS 3173, *Ladies' Negro's Friend Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves, Minutes and Reports, 1826-1889*; Hall, *Civilising Subjects,* pp. 290-309 and see Chapter Two for Baptist involvement in the abolitionist movement.
[56] Hall, *Civilising Subjects,* p. 323; A. Tyrrell, 'Sturge, Joseph (1793-1859), philanthropist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 September 2004*;* https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-26746 (Accessed 7 November 2020). For Sturge see Appendix C.
[57] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, pp. 323-4. Hall also notes that many ladies were present.
[58] *Report of the Proceedings at Birmingham on the 1st and 2nd of August in Commemoration of the Abolition of Negro Apprenticeship in the British Colonies* (Birmingham: Tyler, 1838), pp. 15-17, 19, cited by Hall, *Civilising Subjects,* p. 324.
[59] BA&C 60767, *Report of the meeting of the electors of Birmingham at the Town Hall, Friday 28th November,1834*; Flick*, Birmingham Political Union,* p. 111.

May 1832 but declared that he could not give 'unqualified approbation' to the Melbourne Government which had attacked the unstamped press and the Dorchester labourers. He concluded, turning to the gallery, that he had 'got a Whig in his pocket but he would not put it on'.[60]

Edmonds, Benjamin Hadley and P.H. Muntz organised several more attempts to revive the Political Union, linking this to the campaign for a borough charter once the Municipal Reform Act was passed in September 1835.[61] Meanwhile Birmingham's Tories consolidated their position against further parliamentary or municipal reform, re-launching the Loyal and Constitutional Association in 1834 with the support of Richard Spooner and local aristocratic patrons.[62] A petition war lasted until October 1838 when charters were issued to Birmingham, Manchester and Bolton and on 1 November 1838 the High Bailiff received Birmingham's charter.[63] The campaign for Birmingham's charter was certainly more significant for radical and liberal sections of the middle class than it was for working-class families more concerned with questions of livelihood. Nevertheless, partly through the efforts of Edmonds, Hadley and Muntz, the demand for corporation status was kept linked to the need for national political change.

Edmonds participated in a variety of local radical causes in the mid-1830s in which he consolidated his position as an experienced radical. He acted upon opportunities

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[60] BA&C 60749, *Great meeting in support of the Corporation Reform held in the Town Hall in Birmingham on Tuesday 18th August 1835* (Birmingham: Joseph Webb, 1835), p. 7. The 'Dorchester labourers' were the six trade unionists sentenced to transportation, the Tolpuddle Martyrs.
[61] BA&C 60750, *Reestablishment of the Political Union: Report of the Great Town's Meeting held in the Town Hall Friday 4th September 1835* (Birmingham, 1835); BA&C 60751, *Proceedings of the important Town's Meeting convened by the Political Union in the Town Hall Monday January 18th 1836*; Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, pp. 625-633; Flick*, Birmingham Political Union*, p. 113.
[62] J.T. Bunce, *History of the Corporation of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Birmingham Corporation, 1878), pp. 104-108; Ward*, City-State and Nation,* p. 33.
[63] Gill, *History of Birmingham,* Vol. 1*,* pp. 224-230. The elections and appointments are dealt with below.

to reinstate the campaign for wider political reform and revive the BPU. By the middle of 1837 it was possible to discern, as Taylor has suggested, the emergence of two camps – one led by old BPU radicals favouring both local and national reform and one led by Tories defending the status quo. However, not all issues divided the town so neatly: the dissenting population provided the base and much of the leadership of the anti-church rates movement, the abolitionist campaign reached across both religious and political divides, while the difficulties of administering the Poor Law produced another set of shifting alliances. A change in the social and economic context introduced another challenge to the town and helped propel radicals, including Edmonds, to support the People's Charter.

The re-founding of the BPU

The combination of Whig-Radical pressure for a Birmingham Charter, disillusion with the results of Parliamentary reform, and working-class agitation produced a revival of the BPU in 1837 with a more radical programme, adopted in early 1838. This section explores the circumstances that produced these developments and Edmonds' role. Flick regards the crucial factor as being Attwood's disappointment at the poor reception his currency proposals had received at Westminster; Behagg draws attention to the lack of enthusiasm of the working-class organisations for the revived BPU until it shifted its position on universal suffrage; and Ward, pointing out the importance of alternative working-class organisations, also notes the scepticism that greeted the revival.[64]

[64] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 116-124; Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 189-91; Ward, *City-State and Nation*, pp. 35-6.

If, in the spring of 1837, middle-class radicals and liberals were frustrated with the lack of progress on a Charter for the town, working-class radicals had more pressing economic and social concerns. Trades organisations of various kinds had continued in the 1830s even after the demise of Owenite organisation. Briggs refers to the 'flourishing culture' of trade clubs and friendly societies in the 1830s.[65] Behagg found only 18 reported strikes between 1833 and 1835, but notes that many disputes were settled without recourse to industrial action, especially in a period of good trade.[66] However, the downturn in trade in 1837 produced serious distress.[67] Disturbances outside the Tory candidate's Royal Hotel headquarters, at the time of the July 1837 election, may have reflected the developing social and economic uncertainty as well as sharp political rivalry between Tory and Radical supporters.[68] Trades and unemployed organisers took the initiative in pressing for action to alleviate distress. A meeting of the unemployed drew up a memorial which collected 13,000 signatures and was presented to the leading masters and merchants.[69] The Working Men's Memorial Committee included Henry Watson, who had chaired the United Trades Committee in 1832, Thomas Baker, previously of the Unemployed Committee, and new voices including Edward Brown who 'addressed the meeting at some length and with considerable ability'.[70] The committee members were adamant that they

[65] W. Hutton, *An History of Birmingham*, 6th edition (Birmingham, 1835), p. 294; A. Briggs, 'Social History since 1815' in W. Stephens (ed.), *A History of the County of Warwick*, *Volume 7, The City of Birmingham* (London: VCH, 1964), p. 224.
[66] C. Behagg, 'Custom, Class and Change: the trade societies of Birmingham', *Social History*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (October 1979), pp. 459-461.
[67] In March of 1838, the Relief Committee reported that it had distributed 190,000 quarts of soup and 30,000 loaves of bread and the Mendicity Committee had provided 1400 lodgings, Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, p. 577; see also Barnsby, *Birmingham Working People* (Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services, 1989), pp. 73-4; Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town*, p. 77.
[68] Dent, *Making of Birmingham*, p. 367; Taylor, *Governance and Locality in the Age of Reform,* pp. 155-6.
[69] C. Behagg, 'An Alliance with the Middle Class: The Birmingham Political Union and Early Chartism' in J. Epstein and D. Thompson (eds.), *The Chartist Experience* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 71-72.
[70] *ABG*, 5 June 1837. For Watson, Baker and Brown, see Appendix C.

wanted work and government action, not charity.[71] The workers' and masters' representatives formed a joint committee which, at a proposal from Edmonds and Brown, sent resolutions to ministers on the need for alleviation of distress.[72] This instance points to distinctive organisation on the part of trade unionists and unemployed representatives, putting pressure on employers to seek joint solutions. That Edmonds was active on the committee when he was neither a workman nor master suggests that his presence as an intermediary was considered useful.

Attwood, disappointed by the failure of the Commons to listen to his currency proposals, was persuaded that the time was right for a re-launch of the BPU.[73] Political Union councillors were chosen at a Town Hall meeting on 7 June 1837.[74] A mass meeting took place on Newhall Hill on 19 June 1837 with a parade, bands, banners and flags.[75] Attwood returned to his favourite theme of the inflexibility of the currency as a major cause of distress. Edmonds, lukewarm on the currency question, agreed that Attwood's arguments had much to recommend them, but concentrated on other targets, especially the local Tories, attacking the Earl of Dartmouth 'in his own good-humoured way', reported the *Journal*.[76] The deputation sent to Lord Melbourne called for the repeal of the 1819 Peel Act but also repeal of the corn laws, household suffrage, shorter parliaments, vote by ballot and payment of MPs. Attwood's proposed tactics were equally radical. He introduced the idea of

[71] *BJ*, 3 June 1837.
[72] *BJ*, 17 June 1837; Langford, *A Century,* Vol. 2, pp. 517-8.
[73] Ward, *City-State and Nation*, p. 35.
[74] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, p.117-9. Of the 34 elected, 15 had been on the previous Council, so there was a considerable turn-over. Attwood was made president. The 19 newcomers included P.F. Muntz, R.K. Douglas, Joseph Hall (japanner), and Isaac Aaron, the only Jewish council member. No working men were elected, according to Flick.
[75] *BJ*, 24 June 1837.
[76] *BJ*, 24 June 1837. The Earl had declared that the Political Union was defunct.

simultaneous meetings around the country. If this did not change the government's course, then both masters and men should stop work for an entire week.[77]

In the following six months, June 1837 to January 1838, pressure grew for the BPU to adopt universal manhood suffrage as a goal.[78] The London Working Men's Association (LWMA) had been formed in 1836 and drafted its Charter in January 1837. Agitation over the Poor Law continued in the northern counties, and the *Northern Star* was first published in November 1837. In Birmingham, in the same month, there were calls from the floor of a Town Hall meeting for the Political Union to adopt a more radical stance.[79] At the subsequent meeting of the Political Council, members vied with each other in emphasising their support for universal suffrage. Edmonds was among them and gave an insight into his own understanding of previous compromises:

> …there had always been a desire to keep the question of universal suffrage out of sight at their public meetings with a view to conciliate their Whig friends. It had been done in good faith, but from that time forward the reformers must go on neither looking to the right nor the left.[80]

He was disingenuous here. Attwood's own supporters in his currency circle had been happy to sign up to the restricted proposals of the Reform Bill. Blaming the Whigs for past compromises, as Edmonds did, let the Political Council off the hook. Henry Hetherington, sent by the LWMA to seek an alliance, was now welcomed more

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[77] *BJ* 12 June 1837. This is significant because it confirms that the 'ulterior measures' which became a source of contention in the period of early Chartism 1838-9 were not the preserve of one side in the dispute.
[78] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 121-3; Behagg, *Politics and Production*, p. 192.
[79] *ABG,* 13 November 1837.
[80] BA&C MS 753, *Lovett Collection*, Vol. 2 (Part Two), pp. 152-154.

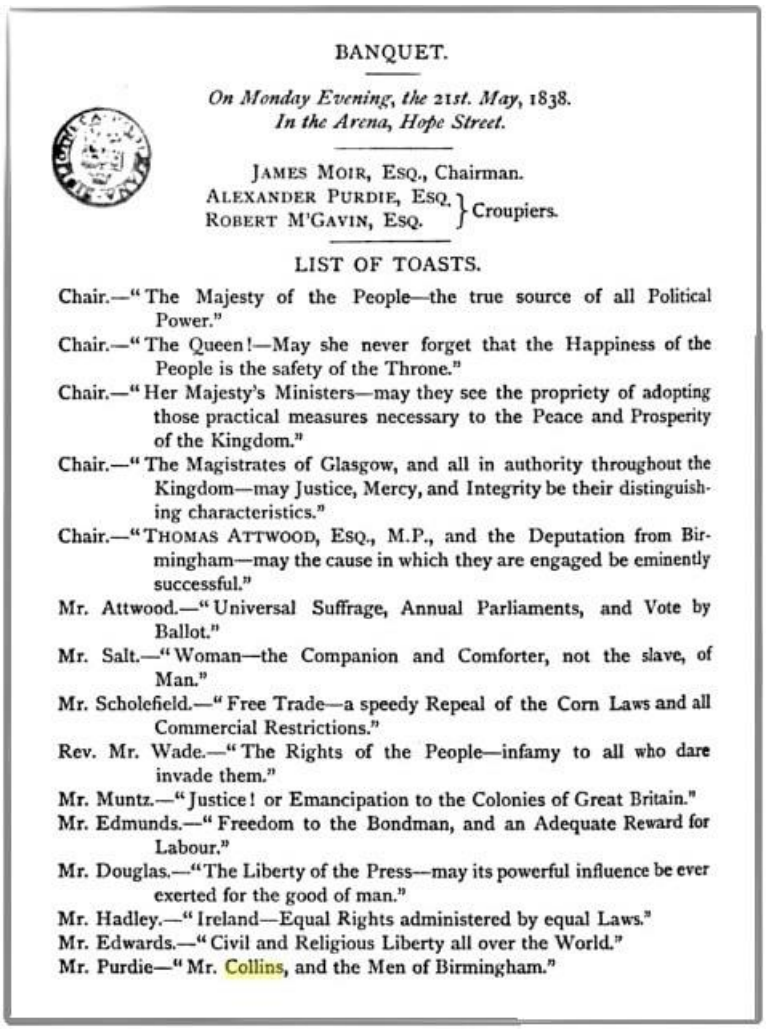
warmly than he had been on his visit in 1831.[81] Once the Political Council adopted the position of manhood suffrage, the Working Men's Memorial Committee formally declared their support for the BPU in January 1838.[82]

In the first half of 1838, the BPU's established place as a leader of the Reform Movement of the early 1830s gave it national prestige. Briggs describes the BPU as a 'hive of activity' in early 1838.[83] Edmonds was part of the delegation sent to Glasgow in May, which met the Reform Committees of Glasgow and Paisley together with representatives from the LWMA. At a rain-drenched rally in Glasgow on 21 May 1838, the new alliance was effectively sealed.[84] Edmonds was introduced to listeners at a soirée as a 'friend to Major Cartwright' (Figure 7.1). This gives a clue to his role in the delegation, embodying a degree of continuity with the earlier radical period. His speech was a classic Edmonds blend of gallantry, humour and reforming logic. He was delighted to be in the presence of so many ladies and such beauty, he said. The Whigs argued it was necessary to educate the people before extending the suffrage:

> …but if a table was set before them and at one end a round of beef, a gigot of mutton and a nice piece of pork, and at the other Milton and Shakespeare and Robert Burns, he would ask them – which would they choose?

[81] ibid.
[82] Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 192.
[83] A. Briggs, *Chartist Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1959), pp. 22-23.
[84] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 133-4; A. Wilson, *The Chartist Movement in Scotland (*Manchester: MUP, 1970), pp. 45-50; M. Chase, *Chartism, a New History* (Manchester: MUP, 2007), pp. 1-7. The tour had been prepared by John Collins, see Appendix C.

Using the classic arguments of popular radicalism, Edmonds suggested that political reforms were the prerequisite for social and economic improvements.[85]



BANQUET.

On Monday Evening, the 21st. May, 1838.
In the Arena, Hope Street.

JAMES MOIR, ESQ., Chairman.
ALEXANDER PURDIE, ESQ. } Croupiers.
ROBERT M'GAVIN, ESQ. }

LIST OF TOASTS.

Chair.—"The Majesty of the People—the true source of all Political Power."
Chair.—"The Queen!—May she never forget that the Happiness of the People is the safety of the Throne."
Chair.—"Her Majesty's Ministers—may they see the propriety of adopting those practical measures necessary to the Peace and Prosperity of the Kingdom."
Chair.—"The Magistrates of Glasgow, and all in authority throughout the Kingdom—may Justice, Mercy, and Integrity be their distinguishing characteristics."
Chair.—"THOMAS ATTWOOD, ESQ., M.P., and the Deputation from Birmingham—may the cause in which they are engaged be eminently successful."
Mr. Attwood.—"Universal Suffrage, Annual Parliaments, and Vote by Ballot."
Mr. Salt.—"Woman—the Companion and Comforter, not the slave, of Man."
Mr. Scholefield.—"Free Trade—a speedy Repeal of the Corn Laws and all Commercial Restrictions."
Rev. Mr. Wade.—"The Rights of the People—infamy to all who dare invade them."
Mr. Muntz.—"Justice! or Emancipation to the Colonies of Great Britain."
Mr. Edmunds.—"Freedom to the Bondman, and an Adequate Reward for Labour."
Mr. Douglas.—"The Liberty of the Press—may its powerful influence be ever exerted for the good of man."
Mr. Hadley.—"Ireland—Equal Rights administered by equal Laws."
Mr. Edwards.—"Civil and Religious Liberty all over the World."
Mr. Purdie—"Mr. Collins, and the Men of Birmingham."

Figure 7.1 Toasts at the Glasgow Dinner 21 May 1838

Source: https://www.chartistcollins.com/chartist-blog

Over the next two months, connections were established with the Great Northern Union (GNU), launched by Feargus O'Connor (1796?–1855) in the Spring of 1838.[86] Against a background of insecure employment and fury at the provisions of the 1834

[85] *Lovett Collection,* pp. 190-192.
[86] J. Epstein, 'O'Connor, Feargus Edward (1796?–1855), Chartist leader', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20515. (Accessed 12 July 2020).

Poor Law Amendment Act, O'Connor had quickly gained support in the northern manufacturing areas with the *Northern Star* selling 10,000 copies weekly.[87] Despite the differences between Birmingham and northern towns, the increasing distress and disillusionment with the Reform Act meant that there was a ready audience for O'Connor's propaganda and a wide readership of the *Northern Star*.[88] Plans were laid for a great meeting in Birmingham, bringing together the different elements that made up early Chartism: the LWMA, the Great Northern Union and the Birmingham Political Union, alongside other radical and working men's associations, including the Scottish Chartists.[89] This meeting, discussed in the next section, took place on Saturday 6 August 1838.

At one level, the old cross-class alliance of 1830-32 had been revived. In another sense, this was different. While Attwood certainly felt the need to broaden the base of the reconvened BPU, and BPU leaders may have been concerned that leadership was passing to other areas, working-class activity in Birmingham itself was a crucial factor in propelling the Political Council to be part of the new Chartist alliance. Edmonds was part of this step and may, in his cooperation with trades leaders, have facilitated this process. Direct pressure from trades and unemployed representatives, driven by economic hardship, together with new radical voices, pushed the BPU to join a movement firmly in favour of universal suffrage. At a meeting of the Political Council of the BPU just before the Holloway Head demonstration, six new names

[87] Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 11-22.
[88] D. Thompson, *The Chartists* (London: Temple Smith, 1984), pp. 39-40. Six agents for the *Northern Star* were listed in 1838 for Birmingham, including James Guest who had led the local campaign for the unstamped press.
[89] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, p. 142; Chase, *Chartism,* pp. 18-19.

were added to the Council – 'all but one belonging to the working classes', including established leaders such as Henry Watson.[90]

Another new element was the presence of a distinct women's organisation, the Female Political Union. While the survey of radical activity in the 1830s reflected the extraordinary energy and commitment of publicly engaged individuals in the town, this was dependent on female labour in the home. Women's presence in campaigning remained restricted although middle-class women had continued to be active in the abolitionist campaign, and some working-class women were active in the cooperative and Owenite organisations in the early 1830s. In February 1838 the Workers' Memorial Committee organised a 'social tea party' with wives and daughters, with several Political Councillors present, including Edmonds.[91] This demonstrated both a recognition of the importance of women's participation and a desire to keep that participation respectable. The Female Political Union represented a new development.[92] The movement grew quickly: when T.C. Salt called a women's meeting for reform in April 1838, a reported 12,000 attended.[93] A further mass meeting was held before the main August demonstration.[94] Edmonds was an invited speaker at the inaugural meeting of the Female Political Union and began by admitting to having his own opinions challenged:

[90] *BJ*, 11 August 1838.
[91] *BJ,* 24 February 1838.
[92] D. Thompson, 'Women In Nineteenth Century Radical politics: a lost dimension', reproduced in *Outsiders: Class, Gender and Nation* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 77-102; H. Rogers, '"What right have women to interfere with politics?" The address of the Female Political Union of Birmingham to the Women of England, 1838', in T. Ashton and G. Smyth (eds.), *Explorations in Cultural History* (London: Pluto, 2001), pp. 65-100; Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 41-45; N. Gauld, *Words and Deeds: Birmingham Suffragists and Suffragettes, 1832-1918* (Alcester: West Midlands History, 2018), pp. 5-7.
[93] *BJ*, 7 April 1838.
[94] BA&C, Birmingham History, F3, T.C. Salt, 'To the Women of Birmingham', 16 August 1838; *BJ*, 28 July 1838.

> When he first heard of the meetings of women taking place in Birmingham, he smiled at the idea of it. People were accustomed to form their notions from the customs of society, and as the political business of the nation had been invariably conducted by men, he thought it strange when he heard it was intended to prevail upon the women to take part in it.[95]

He acknowledged that the undertaking was potentially powerful, and that women could accomplish more in one year than men in many years. This was another piece of Edmonds' flattery, but this time it was aimed at the political capabilities of his audience rather than their appearance.[96]

The Female Political Union ran its own affairs, participated in debates and was important in the collection of the national rent.[97] Although invited speakers were men, it developed its own voice, reminding the Political Council of the economic hardship that underpinned the demand for reform. At a meeting in early November the chairwoman, Mrs Lapworth, suggested that the women could not wait years for a successful outcome of the struggle: 'She thought they had had years enough of misery. They [the women] would have matters settled in a few months.' When John Collins (1802-1852) urged continued unity and suggested that his audience put something by for the winter, a voice called: 'That is impossible, we hardly subsist at present.'[98] This direct experience of hardship may well have ensured that the

[95] *BJ,* 18 August 1838.
[96] N. Gauld, *Words and Deeds: Birmingham Suffragists and Suffragettes, 1832-1918* (Alcester: West Midlands History, 2018), p. 6.
[97] *BJ,* 25 August, 8 September 1838 and subsequently. 'Female' and 'Women's' were used interchangeably in the title of the organisation. The WPU did not at this point argue for the suffrage for women, but this issue was taken up within a few years by minority voices in the Chartist movement, including John Collins.
[98] *BJ,* 10 November 1838. For Collins, see Appendix C.

leadership of the Female Political Union was sympathetic to the working-class side of the split in Birmingham Chartism in the spring of 1839, and its efforts to maintain a presence in the Autumn of 1839 (Figure 7.2).[99]


IMPORTANT
Women of Birmingham.
The Women of Birmingham, more especially those who were Members of
The Female Political Union,
Are requested to MEET at
LAWRENCE STREET CHAPEL,
ON
MONDAY EVENING next,
NOVEMBER 1839, at
A Friend of Humanity,
Whom we can trust, will address them.
THE MEETING WILL COMMENCE AT HALF-PAST SEVEN O'CLOCK.
By Order of the Committee,
October 30, 1839.
M. A. GROVE, Secretary.
M. LUPWORTH, Chairwoman.

Figure 7.2 Advertisement for a meeting called by the Female Political Union

Source: BA&C, Birmingham Printed, F3.

Both Birmingham's working people and the middle-class leaders of the Political Council had experienced disillusion with the workings of the 1832 Reform Act and with the actions of the Whig governments of the 1830s. However, whereas the Political Council members could look to increased local influence through the Corporation, this was little comfort to working–class supporters of Chartism. The

[99] N. Gauld, *Words and Deeds,* pp. 6-7.

contending pressures played out over the following months and Edmonds would find himself unable to bridge the increasing divide between the different elements in this renewed, but changed, coalition.

Edmonds in isolation

Hindsight suggests that the split in Birmingham Chartism in 1839 was inevitable, but this was not necessarily the view of the participants in the summer and autumn of 1838. Differences emerged over the governance of the Political Union and between some BPU leaders and O'Connor, but the drive for unity remained strong. BPU leaders were aware that they could not count on popular support as they had between 1830 and 1832. In this atmosphere, both sides in the debate sought compromise. The exception was George Edmonds who was unable to find a way of reconciling his views with those of O'Connor: this section explores the possible reasons for his stance.

Some differences between the Birmingham leadership and O'Connor were present at the Holloway Head meeting of 6 August 1838. All the leaders were grappling with the question of what to do if the great petition was rejected by Parliament. Attwood proposed a 'Sacred Week', effectively a general strike where workers would stop working and masters would continue to support them, a possibly unrealistic suggestion. He advocated peaceful persuasion but added: 'Woe unto the man who breaks the law against us.'[100] O'Connor took the point further. He declared his support for moral power and agreed that no-one should propose immediately marshalling physical force – such men would turn out to be traitors to the movement. However, 'when the moral strength is expended and the mind drawn out at last, then

[100] *BJ,* 11 August 38.

...cursed be that virtuous man who refused to repel force with force'. This proposal drew 'loud and long continued cheers'.[101] Gammage acknowledged that O'Connor was the 'lion of the day'.[102] O'Connor also managed, despite pledging allegiance to Attwood, to criticise the BPU for its previous acceptance of the Reform Act. Edmonds defended the BPU against O'Connor's implied attack: he declared, to cheers: 'They had not been dictated to by the Whig government... They had, perhaps dictated a little to that government.'[103] Several workers addressed the meeting, including a thoughtful Henry Watson who pointed out that universal suffrage would not in itself feed and clothe the working people. The ideas of the National Convention and a National Rent were agreed and eight delegates – Douglas, the Muntz brothers, Salt, Hadley, John Pierce, Edmonds and John Collins – were elected.[104]

Tensions emerged over the next few months within the Political Council over the organisation of the Union. Behagg and Barnsby argue that these questions of democratic control were as significant in the rupture within Birmingham Chartism as the question of moral versus physical force, if not more so. Certainly, the Rent Committee and weekly meeting of artisans became significant and were increasingly dominated by O'Connor's supporters.[105] However, for Edmonds, the question of when and how to express the threat of physical force assumed paramount importance, and the discussion here therefore concentrates on that issue. Edmonds had on many occasions, especially during the crises of October 1831 and May 1832, made clear that he did not eschew the use of physical force. Speeches by both

[101] *BJ*, 11 August 1838.
[102] R. Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement 1837-1854* (London: Merlin Press, 1969 [1894]), p. 44.
[103] *BJ*, 11 August 1838.
[104] BA&C 60753, *The Grand Midland Demonstration at Birmingham, August 6, 1838* (Birmingham, 1838).
[105] Tholfsen, 'The Chartist Crisis in Birmingham', pp. 465-466; Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 97-200; Barnsby, *Birmingham Working People*, p. 78.

O'Connor and Edmonds at a rally in Liverpool on 25 September 1838 show the complex nature of the developing differences. James Epstein points out that Edmonds, 'O'Connor's sternest critic in Birmingham, stood alongside him in Liverpool...and proclaimed the right to use physical force against tyranny'.[106] Edmonds emphasised that he and O'Connor agreed on 'the right of Englishmen to resort to physical force when driven to it by a tyrannical oppressive and unyielding body', but he also pointed out that O'Connor had declared at the Birmingham rally that anyone recommending the use of physical force in the current circumstances was a traitor.[107]

Over the next two months, as the mood in the North hardened, differences within the BPU sharpened. At first there was support in the BPU Council for the torchlight meetings; Salt even read out a speech by anti-poor law agitator J.R. Stephens (1805-1879) approvingly to the Female Political Union.[108] However, at the end of October, Douglas made an open attack on Stephens, while Salt suggested that 'doctrines of violence' were being advanced.[109] At a Political Council meeting on 6 November Edmonds attacked the strategy and tactics being advocated by Stephens and, by implication, O'Connor. He repeated his belief in the right of resistance but, referencing the events of Pentrich and Cato Street, warned against the activities of spies and the dangers of a rising for which the army would undoubtedly be prepared.

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[106] J. Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O'Connor and the Chartist Movement 1832-1842* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1982), p.124.
[107] *Northern Star*, 29 September 1838.
[108] *BJ,* 13 Oct 1838; Chase, *Chartism,* pp. 36-40; 'Joseph Rayner Stephens', https://spartacus-educational.com/IRstephens.htm. The torchlight meetings were held outside the northern industrial towns because Chartists were excluded from holding them in the towns.
[109] Stephens' advice to a crowd in Carlisle to buy muskets had been widely reported.

> No they must not thus advise the people. They must open before them the book of their misery; they must explain to them the cause of it and concentrate all their moral power to have it remedied. They must point out the evils they had to endure and if in their peaceful pursuit the law was broken against the people, then, indeed he would say resistance to oppression would be justifiable.[110]

This was the essence of Edmonds' argument – there is a constitutional right to bear arms and to rebel against tyranny, but the present circumstances do not justify a rising; furthermore it would be suicidal to engage in one and force would only be justified against an unlawful attack by the state. This outline of the 'moral force' argument shows that the two positions were not diametrically opposed to each other: the advocates of 'moral force' acknowledged the legitimacy of the use of physical force in specific circumstances while most 'physical force' advocates supported the use of mass campaigning. In practice, however, the differences became sharp in the autumn of 1838: followers of O'Connor and the *Northern Star* could not envisage a long patient wait for the suffrage, while the traditional Birmingham leadership feared an outbreak of violence and the prospect of defeat. These differences deepened in early 1839 when the Convention and later the Simultaneous Meetings discussed what 'ulterior measures' would be employed.

A further insight into Edmonds' views can be gleaned from his comments at a meeting on 5 November when the Charter for Incorporation was read for the first time. He recollected the events of the first wave of reform protests and the physical

[110] *BJ,* 10 November 1838.

force occasionally used by the Tories. He remembered a Whig deputation pleading with him to call off a meeting:

> His own father partook of the fear, and he well recollected that he was at home praying, if not crying, for fear lest the worst consequences would befall his son, and the inhabitants….During and since that time he had never violated any law of his country and he knew all his exertions had been directed to the achievement of the liberties of his country.[111]

Evidently, the experience of earlier years bore down on Edmonds: he did not regret his actions, but he did not want to put reformers in danger again. He was stretching a point when he suggested he had not violated any law: after all, the law had been interpreted in such a way as to lead to his prosecution and imprisonment.

O'Connor responded to the criticisms in the Political Council, protesting at misrepresentation and challenged Salt to a debate.[112] He arrived in Birmingham to cheering crowds. Edmonds meanwhile repeated his criticisms at the Political Council:

> If either Mr Stephens or Mr O'Connor named a day for fighting, they were either greater fools or traitors or mad enthusiasts.... but the honest men of Birmingham should never be led into a halter by him [Mr Edmonds]. No man should fix a day and be led to the slaughter like sheep...as long as he could prevent it. No by God he would not stand for it.[113]

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[111] *BJ,* 10 November 1838.
[112] *BJ,* 17 November 1838.
[113] *BJ,* 24 November 1838. Probably the origin of the rather misleading claim by Langford that Edmonds said 'the honest men of Birmingham would not stand for it'. (Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2. pp. 635-6).

By the time of the set-piece debate planned for the Town Hall on Wednesday 28 November, Salt and O'Connor had patched up a deal: O'Connor would not argue for 'naming a day', and in return Salt apologised for any offence. However, Edmonds broke the truce and insisted on asking O'Connor whether he adhered to the principle of physical force. There was no need to probe a healing wound, suggested O'Connor in reply. Edmonds faced hisses and jeers and for a while was unable to speak. Douglas and Salt clearly wanted Edmonds to back down and P.H. Muntz had to intervene to win Edmonds a hearing. Edmonds' fiercest attack was on Stephens' recommendation of drilling and arming which would 'subject every man of them to transportation for 7 years'. Conscious of the likely comparisons with the Days of May, he added that 'in the three days' crisis of 1832 he had made up his mind to take his lot – but the times were now different...At that time they were struggling against a contemptible body'.[114] In that statement Edmonds gave more legitimacy to the government of the day compared to Wellington's – possibly because of its political complexion or because he considered that the 1832 Act, for all its limitations, conferred such legitimacy. Either way, those disillusioned with the 1832 settlement were not persuaded by this argument. Various emollient declarations were made after Edmonds' speech and order seemed to have been restored.[115] A week later P.H. Muntz, chairing the Political Council, expressed dismay at the reception Edmonds had received, but pleasure at the agreement made at the meeting.[116] However, Edmonds resigned his position from the Political Council shortly afterwards.[117] He did not appear again at the Political Council until he addressed it

[114] *BJ*, 1 Dec 1839.
[115] *BJ*, 1 Dec 1839. Edmonds and O'Connor successfully pleaded with P.H. Muntz to withdraw his resignation from the Political Council; Edmonds made his plea to Muntz in the name of meeting 'and in the name of the ladies who I see before me.'
[116] *BJ*, 8 Dec 1838.
[117] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, p. 163.

as a guest on 2 February 1839, and he never took up his place as a Convention delegate.

The long-anticipated Charter of the new Corporation framed the reasons for Edmonds' action in late 1838 and early 1839. It arrived on 1 November 1839 and Birmingham's first municipal election was held on 26 December. The liberals swept the board, and several members of the Political Council of the BPU were either elected councillors or appointed to posts.[118] George Edmonds was nominated as Clerk of the Peace for the Quarter Sessions, although it was recognised that this appointment would have to be confirmed when the Quarter Sessions had actually been granted.[119]

At this point Edmonds could have sought a rapprochement with his previous allies in the Political Union or eschewed political engagement altogether on the grounds of his nomination, but, perhaps with typical stubbornness, he chose instead to form an alliance with Joshua Scholefield and others to pursue the question of the Corn Laws, joining a deputation to the new Town Council on 12 January 1839. The Council agreed to adopt a petition against the Corn Laws, something vigorously opposed by many Political Union leaders and Chartist supporters.[120] At the 'Great Anti-Corn Law Meeting' of January 1839, the anti-corn law faction was defeated and Edmonds was shouted down. The meeting overwhelmingly passed an amendment from Benjamin Hadley, which stated that there was no point in taking forward a petition on the Corn

[118] Ward, *City-State and Nation*, pp. 34-5. William Scholefield was chosen from amongst the councillors to be Charter Mayor. William Redfern was appointed Town Clerk and R.K. Douglas was appointed Registrar of the Mayor's Court.
[119] Bunce, *History of the Corporation of Birmingham*, pp. 160-161.
[120] Bunce, *History of the Corporation*, pp. 165-168. Middle-class radicals in Birmingham were split by the question. Currency theorists disagreed with free-traders while the wider Chartist movement argued that the franchise should come before anything else.

Laws until universal suffrage was granted.[121] Edmonds received a warmer welcome when he arrived the following evening at the Political Council, but he declined an opportunity to speak until the official business was over. Edmonds' speech revealed the political and personal turmoil that had beset him but also suggested that he had constructed a rationale for his choices. He did not regret adopting his position on the need to pursue the campaign against the Corn Laws:

> When I encountered your displeasure in reference to Mr O'Connor, I confess the excitement was so great that it did affect me; and I am free to acknowledge I felt unwell after it; but yesterday was not the case. I went to bed with a consciousness that I had done my duty towards the people; and I felt calm and resigned under the result.[122]

He believed that both the campaigns against the Corn Laws and the new Poor Law should be pursued: 'You cannot get universal suffrage this year, and it is unwise to lay it down as a principle that you will not ask for, nor obtain, anything else in the interim.'[123] This was in line with his long-established pragmatic approach, but on this occasion he was not taking his audience with him.

Why did Edmonds try to force a break with O'Connor and then remove himself from the BPU leadership? It is impossible to know exactly how the different pressures on Edmonds intersected with firmly-held beliefs. To someone who had spent his life insecurely in terms of political survival and employment, the lure of the position of Clerk of the Peace must have been considerable. He was still only an attorney's

[121] *BJ*, 2 February 1839.
[122] *BJ*, 2 February 1839.
[123] *BJ*, 2 February 1839. This suggests that Edmonds had been unwell at the end of 1839 but reports in the *Birmingham Journal* indicate that he continued to appear in the Magistrates' Court. This was not the serious illness that afflicted him in May.

clerk and continued to face the hostility of the Birmingham Law Society.[124] His family responsibilities and difficulties in this period were significant. His brother Edward Amos Edmonds, to whom he was close, killed himself in London in 1836, and George and Patience became responsible for at least one and possibly two of Edward's children. His daughter Clarissa's marriage in 1837 may have lessened costs, but left Patience with less support in the household, which included their disabled son Horace.[125] Edmonds arguably had most to lose if the municipal project failed. Other BPU leaders, including those who were prepared to seek a compromise with O'Connor in the autumn of 1838, also had the prospect of positions and influence ahead of them, but they had more comfortable backgrounds and no history of imprisonment.

On the other hand, Edmonds' political argument with O'Connor was heartfelt and had an internal logic, although his explanation of earlier struggles was partial and his argument that circumstances had changed was less than compelling. He was, more than any other participant in the debate, conscious of the dangers of challenging the state but could not find a convincing alternative strategy to that of O'Connor within the traditional programme of popular radicalism.

'A particularly unpopular sort of man'

Having resigned from the Political Union, Edmonds was not directly concerned in the final demise of the BPU and the split in the town's Chartist movement, but he was certainly affected by it. This section examines that impact and the circumstances around the confirmation of Edmonds' appointment to the post of Clerk of the Peace.

[124] See Chapter Five.
[125] For further details, see Chapter Nine and Appendix B, 'The Family of Edward Amos Edmonds'.

Tracing Edmonds' place in the events of 1839 can cast some light on the nature of the split in the movement and the disturbances in May-July. For Langford and Dent, these resulted from the triumph of 'dangerous counsels'; for Clive Behagg, the movement divided between the middle-class leaders who, having achieved their goal of municipalisation, turned against the Convention; while for Malcolm Chase, the events in Birmingham relate to the national role of the Convention as well as to the local resentments felt by Birmingham Chartists against former allies.[126] Donna Taylor, using a cultural approach, has drawn attention to the importance of the contestation of space and symbolic protests. She considers that two sides had emerged around the question of municipalisation and that the events are best explained by a 'whole town' analysis rather than one based on class conflict.[127]

Relations between the contending parts of the BPU deteriorated further in the winter of 1839. The Birmingham delegates to the National Convention, apart from Collins, resigned in March 1839, alarmed at the discussion of ulterior measures and physical force.[128] On Monday 1 April 1839 a 'Meeting of the Working Classes' at Holloway Head deplored the resignations and proposed an 'Observational Committee' be set up to act on behalf of the Convention in Birmingham. Edward Brown accused the delegates of 'deserting their posts', suggesting it was the lure of the corporation that underlay the lack of enthusiasm from the delegates and Political Councillors.

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[126] Dent, *The Making of Birmingham,* pp. 367-371; Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, p. 656; M. Weaver, 'The Birmingham Bull Ring Riots of 1839: Variations on a Theme of Class Conflict', *Social Science Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 1, 1997, pp. 137–148; Behagg*, Politics and Production*, pp. 208-218; Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 75-84.

[127] D. Taylor, *To the Bull Ring! Politics, Protest and Policing in Birmingham during the Early Chartist Period* (Unpub. M Res thesis, University of Birmingham, 2013).

[128] *BJ*, 1 March, 23 March, 30 March 1839; Tholfsen 'The Chartist Crisis in Birmingham', p. 467. The precise reasons for the resignations were disputed at the time and have been since. The delegates may indeed have been alarmed at the changing rhetoric but may also have felt that their interests were different from the majority in the Convention. (Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 200-202; Chase, *Chartism,* p. 67).

Edmonds did not escape criticism. Mr Bussey, a delegate from Yorkshire to the National Convention, was introduced as 'the man who exposed the traitor George Edmonds'.[129] The final meeting of the Political Council took place on 9 April.[130] Leadership of the Chartist movement in Birmingham was now firmly in the hands of the working-class activists. On Monday 22 April a meeting at Holloway Head agreed to appoint Brown, John Powell and Donaldson as Convention delegates. A placard with Salt's name and a copy of the *Birmingham Journal* were ceremonially burnt, marking the open division.[131]

In a speech at a tea party held to celebrate the opening of a new Unitarian chapel on 1 May, Edmonds jokingly referred to himself as 'a particularly unpopular sort of man' and suggested he had worried about his reception before recollecting that he was meeting a 'rational audience'. He received a warm welcome. However, soon after this he fell seriously ill. Whether this was as a result of his 'apoplexy' or his asthma, which was later noted by physicians at the two asylums where he was placed in 1868, or an unknown infection, it is a reasonable assumption that the strains of the preceding period contributed to his illness. The next mention in the *Journal* came on 25 May: 'This excellent and long-tried friend of liberty, and of the rights of his fellow men, is so much recovered as to afford hopes that he will soon be restored to health, if not to strength.' This announcement of his recovery may have been premature, and it was perhaps late June before he was active.

Edmonds' formal appointment as Clerk of the Peace was made by the Town Council on 14 May after confirmation had been received of the grant of Quarter Sessions.

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[129] *BJ,* 6 April 1839. It has not been possible to find further details. Peter Bussey was the delegate from Bradford, according to Judge, 'Early Chartist Organisation and the Convention of 1839', p. 383.
[130] *BJ,* 13 April 1839.
[131] *BJ,* 27 April 1839.

Matthew Davenport Hill was appointed as Recorder at the same time.[132] Edmonds' name appears on the notice of the first Quarter Sessions and he took his oath on Friday 5 July, alongside Matthew Davenport Hill, although William Morgan, whom Edmonds had appointed as his Deputy, acted for most of the first Sessions.[133] Eliezer Edwards suggests that Edmonds' appointment was made as a form of thanks for long service as a reformer and at a point when the Council had not expected him to live to undertake the duties of office.[134] That Edmonds was extremely ill is confirmed by the fact that he had urged William Morgan to stand for the position in his stead.[135] When he had recovered sufficiently to attend the Town Council on 24 June, he thanked them for confirming his appointment when he was 'very fast travelling to that country from whose bourne no traveller ever returned'.[136] There is further backing for this view of the appointment in R.K. Douglas's open letter to Peel in August, in which he justified Edmonds' appointment saying that the Council should not be blamed for having wished to 'soothe his last moments'.[137] However, the initial nomination and provisional appointment in December 1838 had been made in different circumstances. Edmonds had been unwell following the dispute with O'Connor in November 1838 but had not then been on his death-bed.[138] The explanation that the appointment was made in thanks for long-standing services to reform is more plausible than the suggestion that it was only made because no-one expected Edmonds actually to take up the post.

[132] *ABG*, 20 May 1839; Bunce, *History of the Corporation,* pp. 178-179.
[133] *ABG,* 1 and 8 July 1839; Edwards, 'George Edmonds'.
[134] Edwards, 'George Edmonds'.
[135] Edwards, 'George Edmonds'.
[136] *ABG,* 1 July 1839; *BJ*, 29 June 1839.
[137] *BJ,* 3 August 1839.
[138] *BJ* 2 February 1839; 15, 22, 29 December 1838.

An alternative view is that Edmonds' appointment was made to ensure that, as a long-standing radical and scourge of the establishment, it was better to make him part of it. A contributor of reminiscences in the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* in 1908 put it bluntly: 'The authorities finally stopped his mouth by making him Clerk of the Peace.'[139] This suggestion, expressed sixty years on, may reflect a widespread view. It may indeed have been part of the original motivation of the radicals who made up the new Corporation, but in December 1839, Edmonds was no longer a firebrand; he was rather a strong defender of the approach of the old BPU. He was, though, still a loose cannon. It is likely that those appointing Edmonds, and confirming the appointment in May 1839, had several motives.

Edmonds' involvement in the events of the spring and summer of 1839, even if only tangential and limited, cast light on both his own dilemmas and the divisions in the town. As a result of his illness, Edmonds missed the arrival of the National Convention in Birmingham, the mass meetings and the first round of arrests. However, he was not spared the protests directed at individuals who were considered to have betrayed the reform movement. He later remembered that 'when he was on his death bed some people calling themselves Radicals surrounded his house and threatened to drag him out'.[140] He emerged to find a situation in which Birmingham's Chartists were expressing deep resentments at the action of the magistrates who were allowing prosecutions to go ahead. Henry Wilkes, for instance, a veteran of the 1832 campaign, pointed out to magistrate and former BPU political council member P.H. Muntz, that in 1832: 'There were no such interruptions

[139] *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 28 November 1908. The author, Edward Preston, had referred to Edmonds' large mouth.
[140] *BJ*, 30 November 1839; Taylor, *To the Bull Ring!* pp. 50-51. Taylor identifies several examples, such as protests at Salt's factory.

or prosecutions. The influential gentlemen then took part with the people, and there were no such objections raised.'[141] Edmonds found himself back in the role of vainly trying to bring two sides together. When he attended the Town Council on 24 June to proffer thanks for his appointment, he felt the need to remind members of the need to preserve liberties:

> I consider you as the representatives of the liberal people of Birmingham and as the firm friends of civil and religious liberty… and without wishing you to interfere in politics beyond your sphere, I say I hope you pledge yourselves – as I now that I am appointed pledge myself – to continue as the unchangeable friend of civil and religious liberty to the last hour of my life. I hope you will excuse this one allusion. I do it to repel the base imputations that have been cast upon me and others.[142]

Here Edmonds appears to be not only putting pressure on his radical allies in the Council, but also suggesting that he had not changed his views as well as defending himself against accusations of betrayal made by the Chartist demonstrators.

Edmonds' actions in July and August, and his subsequent comments, suggest that he had sympathy with some of the key figures who were arrested and that he formed a view of the riots that was shared by a number of previous BPU adherents, that is, blaming O'Connor on the one hand and the metropolitan police on the other. Edmonds acted in court, pleading for bail for John Collins and defending another Chartist, George Julian Harney. Collins and William Lovett had been arrested as

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[141] *BJ,* 22 June 1839; A. Briggs, 'Political and Administrative History: Political History from 1832', in *A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 7, the City of Birmingham,* ed. W. B. Stephens (London, 1964), pp. 298-317, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol7/pp298-317 (accessed 2 March 2016).
[142] *BJ,* 29 June 1839.

signatories to a placard issued on 5 July which condemned the actions of the magistrates and the London police.[143] On Monday 8 July they came up before the bench; several local radicals tried unsuccessfully to stand surety for Collins: 'Mr Edmonds exerted himself with great zeal on behalf of Collins but could not succeed in removing the objections of the magistrates.'[144] It was a situation full of irony: in an echo of July 1819, two committed constitutionalists, on the 'moral force' wing of the movement, found themselves in jail and now another, from that previous generation, could not get them out.

Harney had been arrested in connection with a speech made in May and appeared before the bench on Monday 15 July. Edmonds had found witnesses to counteract the charges. None of them had heard Harney refer to muskets – it may have been 'biscuits' - and in connection with plans for surviving the Sacred Month, he had merely referred to the 'hills being the Lord's and the cattle thereon'. These ingenious witness statements were not enough to prevent Harney being set down for the Warwickshire Assizes.[145] When the case came to trial, it was deferred to the following Spring, and then the charges were dismissed, officially on the grounds that Harney had abstained from activity.[146] Later in life Harney remembered Edmonds with affection: he had volunteered his services and 'so shattered the evidence of the only witness for the prosecution that, on the depositions being laid before the grand jury, the bill of indictment was thrown out'.[147]

[143] Taylor, *To the Bull Ring!,* p. 62.
[144] *Coventry Standard,* 12 July 1839.
[145] *BJ,* 20 July 1839.
[146] *Examiner*, 5 April 1840.
[147] *Notes and Queries*, 31 December 1881, p. 539; see also Appendix 'The Two George Edmonds'.

Edmonds also attempted to defend the militant Chartist, Edward Brown. Lawyer Mr Lawrence objected on the grounds that if the case went to the Quarter Sessions, Edmonds' position would be compromised. Edmonds argued that the case would go to the Assizes not to the Sessions where he acted as Clerk. This was accepted but the incident caused a stir which drew further attention to Edmonds' record.[148] A few weeks later, Peel used the Town Council's appointment of Edmonds as part of a justification for his refusal to grant the Police Bill to the Corporation. He quoted some of Edmonds' more inflammatory past speeches and his recent defence of Harney.[149] Edmonds was defended in Parliament not only by Attwood and Scholefield, but also by Joseph Hume and Daniel O'Connell who called him 'a most honourable man and a thorough reformer'.[150]

Edmonds, perhaps more than any other of the old radicals, was caught in the contradictions of 1839. He wanted to protest at the actions of the police and was prepared to defend those arrested but could not condone the riots and still considered that O'Connor's policies had led in that direction. Later in August, Edmonds was invited to preside at the New Publicans' Protection Society dinner. Here he deplored the 'foolish and wicked course recommended by some of the new leaders.' He urged his audience to adopt the old constitutional system of legal and peaceful agitation. More controversially, he defended P.H Muntz, and the mayor, William Scholefield, suggesting that they had tried to mitigate the magistrates' actions, but 'had no choice when property was threatened'.[151] It had, of course, been open for these magistrates to resign rather than participate in what were clearly

[148] *Evening Mail,* 22 July 1839. Edmonds' defence of Brown is less surprising when it is remembered that the two had worked together in the Masters and Workers Committee of 1837. Later Edmonds and Brown fell out when Edmonds accused the latter of being a spy. See entry for Brown in Appendix C.
[149] Bunce, *History of the Corporation,* pp. 194-5.
[150] *BJ,* 3 August 1839. Peel went ahead and refused the Birmingham Police Bill.
[151] *BJ,* 31 August 1839.

politically motivated and broad-brush judgements. Edmonds was not prepared to break with them. Whatever good will he won from the likes of Harney, whatever support he retained from old style radicals, he remained a target for local Chartists. 'Mr Douglas of the *Birmingham Journal* and Mr George Edmonds had ceased carping when they got into safe corporation berths…', commented the Chartist leader George White in 1842.[152]

Edmonds' experience, being targeted by Chartist protestors along with other erstwhile leaders and unable to reconcile the two sides after his recovery, revealed the depths of the divisions in the town. The leadership of Birmingham Chartism split along class lines in April. These divisions partly related to municipalisation, as Taylor has suggested, but were also the culmination of differences over the approach to political reform that had developed between working-class representatives and the traditional middle-class leaders. Such differences had been expressed in the pressure applied on BPU leaders to adopt universal suffrage at the end of 1837 and developed into the split in the Convention in March 1839, supporting the view that class division and conflict were expressed in the events of May-July 1839.

Edmonds' activities in the mid-1830s show that he continued to be a supporter of political reform who was able to relate to both the working-class and middle-class wings of the movement. The programme of popular, constitutional radicalism that he espoused still seemed elastic enough to allow this. However, as political and class antagonisms deepened, the programme was differently interpreted by the opposing wings of the movement. Edmonds' commitment to a reform movement characterised

[152] *BJ,* 16 July 1842.

by cooperation between the classes could not survive the events of 1838 and 1839. He was genuinely fearful of the dangers posed by O'Connor's physical-force Chartism but struggled to explain his own view. Given that he himself had recognised the necessity of defensive force, especially during the Days of May, he was open to charges of hypocrisy and this contributed to his views being dismissed.

It is impossible to know for certain whether his break from an O'Connor-led movement was partially motivated by his desire for a 'safe berth'. The likelihood is that a mixture of political principle, an acute awareness of his exposed position, and his need for security all played a part. The same difficulties faced him when he recovered from his bout of serious illness: he could not reconcile his attachment to the middle-class leaders of the defunct Political Union with his instinct to defend those whom he considered had been unjustly accused. He retained popular support in many quarters but would never again be a leader of a popular movement.

Chapter Eight

EDMONDS, THE PHILOSOPHIC ALPHABET AND UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

Edmonds pursued his interest in philology and language reform throughout his full and energetic life. He published his *Philosophic Alphabet* in 1832 and went on to create a new universal language, which appeared in his *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language* in 1856.[1] This chapter examines the context, motivations and impact of Edmonds' endeavours in this field. It asks what led Edmonds to devote so much time and energy to this work; whether his interest was related to his radical views and motivated by a desire to improve communication within or between nations; or whether it was a parallel but separate life-long interest. It considers whether this interest may have developed into something of an obsession, a view hinted at in Eliezer Edwards' biographical sketch:

> During the whole of his busy political life; all through his active professional career; amid the strife and the worry, the turmoil, and the rancour, of the controversy in which he was so prominent; it was his habit to rise from his bed at three or four o'clock in the morning to endeavour to master this intricate task. In the failures of others who had essayed this gigantic work, he saw only incentives to fresh exertions.[2]

[1] G. Edmonds, *The Philosophic Alphabet: with an Explanation of its Principles, and a Variety of Extracts, illustrating its adaptation to the Sounds of the English language, and also of the Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, Italian and Spanish, to which is added, a Philosophic System of Punctuation* (London: Simkin and Marshall, 1832); *A Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language: comprising a scientific classification of the radical elements of discourse and illustrative translations from the holy scriptures and the principal British classics, to which is added a Dictionary of the Language* (London: Richard Griffin, 1856).

[2] E. Edwards, 'George Edmonds', *Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men* (Birmingham, 1877).

Discussion of the history of artificial languages has focused not only on the technical aspects of their development but on the context of the various attempts. For example, James Knowlson and Rhodri Lewis examine the reasons for interest in a universal language during the Enlightenment, the balance of religious and secular motives and the desire to better understand and reflect nature. Umberto Eco explores what he refers to as 'the dream of a perfect language', concentrating on the European strand of the search and examining the context, achievements and limitations of various attempts. Arika Okrent's *In the Land of Invented Languages*, a popular work by a linguistics scholar, is the most accessible of recent treatments of the subject. She charts the late nineteenth-century shift from the invention of 'a priori' languages, based on first principles, to the creation of 'a posteriori' ones such as Esperanto, based on existing languages.[3]

The discussion in this chapter focuses on Edmonds' attempt to develop an 'a priori' language using the model of the seventeenth-century language devised by Bishop John Wilkins (1614-1672) whose *Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* was published in 1668.[4] It asks what factors influenced Edmonds' approach and discusses the context in which he worked.

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[3] J. Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes in England and France, 1600-1800* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1975); U. Eco, *The Search for a Perfect Language* (London: Fontana, 1997); P. Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory: the Quest for a Universal Language* (London: Continuum International, 2006); R. Lewis, *Language, Mind and Nature: Artificial Languages in England from Bacon to Locke* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007); A. Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages: a Celebration of Linguistic Creativity, Madness and Genius* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2010). Okrent goes on to explore the myriad twentieth-century invented languages, some using symbols, some concerned with logic, and others, such as Elvish and Klingon, developing a life beyond the fiction that first inspired them.

[4] J. Wilkins, *An Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (London: Gellibrand and Martin, 1668); J. Henry, 'Wilkins, John (1614–1672), theologian and natural philosopher', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-29421 (Accessed 23 July 2020).

The primary sources used for this discussion include Wilkins' *Essay* and Edmonds' publications, which taken together, and using relevant illustrations, show the extent of Edmonds' debt to Wilkins. Edmonds' two works also give an insight into his motivations. Works by Joseph Priestley and Thomas Hill, together with reviews, memoirs and Eliezer Edward's biography, are used to explore the context and reception of his work.

The first section of the chapter considers the background to Edmonds' interest in the topic. It includes a brief overview of seventeenth-century Enlightenment endeavour in this field and its legacy, asking to what extent the search for a universal language was known to those like Edmonds who had an amateur interest in language and its uses. The next section looks at Edmonds' two publications, his work on a reformed alphabet and his attempt at creating a universal language, assessing its debt to Wilkins' work. Lastly, there is an examination of how his work was received, and the likely impact on other aspects of his life before a final discussion of the place that this undertaking had in his story.

The context of Edmonds' interest in language reform

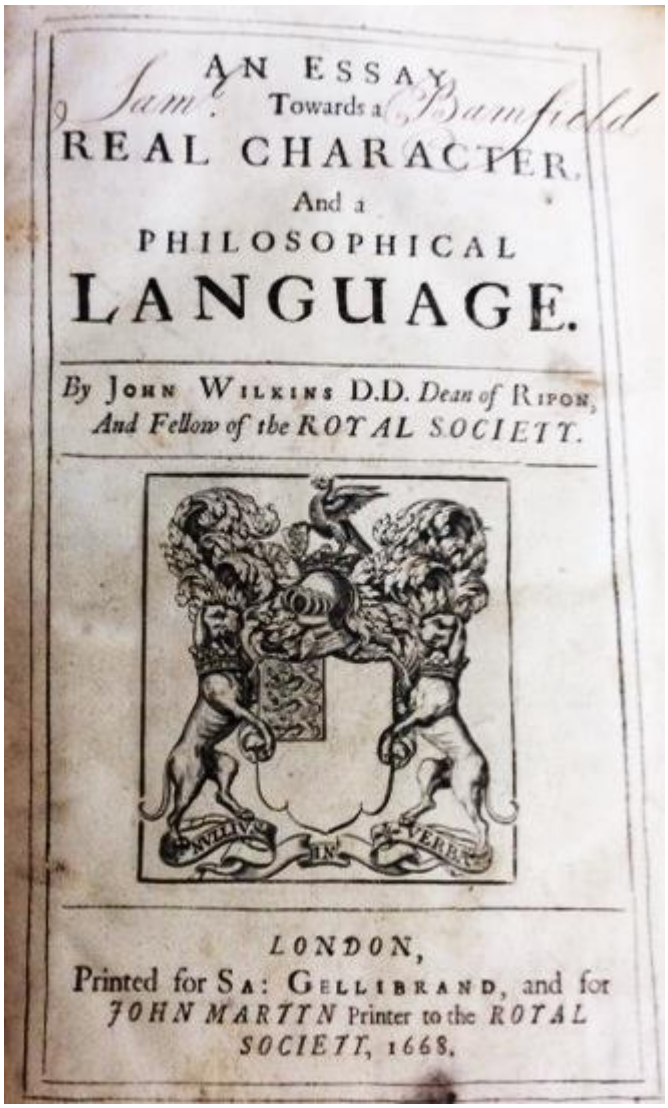
Edmonds showed an early enthusiasm for linguistic endeavours and grammatical principles. An entry in Joseph Dixon's diary reveals that the two friends had visited Mr Bagley, 'the first linguist in the kingdom' in May 1811.[5] Bagley, who was a master at Allatt's school in Shrewsbury, had published a *Grammar of Eleven Languages*.[6] Edmonds continued this interest, writing articles about aspects of grammar in W.

[5] See Chapter Three; CRL MS 14/1, *Diary of Joseph Dixon* Vol. One, p. 54.
[6] 'Shrewsbury,' *Bradshaw's Guide,* available at https://beta.bradshaws.guide/places/england/shropshire/shrewsbury (accessed 16 August 2019).

Hawkes Smith's *Birmingham Inspector* in 1817 and in his own *Weekly Register* in 1819.[7] As a Sunday school teacher, schoolmaster, public speaker and journalist he would have had ample opportunity to contemplate both the richness of the English language and the difficulties posed by its orthography and grammar. His interest was further awakened by encounters with the universal language tradition. In the 'Preface' to the *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language*, dated 1855, Edmonds said he first came across Bishop Wilkins' book nearly forty years beforehand. [8] This puts the date at about 1816.

Wilkins' work was the best known of the attempts prevalent in the seventeenth century at creating a new language in Britain (see Figure 8.1). Interest in the idea of a universal language had grown in the context of early Enlightenment concern with the expansion of knowledge and the desire for more accurate representation and categorisation of concepts. In addition, Latin was losing its position as the international *lingua franca*, scholarship was expanding and there was a perceived need for improved communication between scholars.[9] Earlier attempts by Renaissance thinkers, often having religious and evangelising motives, had centred on overcoming the problem of there being many languages, created by God's retribution for the building of the Tower of Babel.[10]

[7] *Birmingham Inspector*, pp. 163, 224, 240, 303-5; *Edmonds's Weekly Register*, Nos. 7-9, 9 - 23 October 1819.
[8] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language,* Preface, p. v.
[9] Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages, p. 26.*
[10] Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes,* pp. 9-15; U. Eco, *The Search for a Perfect Language*, pp. 7-24; G. Jones, Review 'In the Land of Invented Languages, Arika Okrent, New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2009', *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, Vol. 22, No. 2, August 2012, pp. E115-E116. The relative weight of the various motivations is the subject of debate amongst linguistic historians, but that debate lies outside the purview of this account.



AN ESSAY
Towards a
REAL CHARACTER,
And a
PHILOSOPHICAL
LANGUAGE.

By JOHN WILKINS D.D. *Dean of* RIPON,
And Fellow of the ROYAL SOCIETY.

LONDON,
Printed for SA: GELLIBRAND, and for
JOHN MARTYN Printer to the *ROYAL*
SOCIETY, 1668.

<u>Figure 8.1</u> Frontispiece, John Wilkins' *Essay* (1668)

Images from John Wilkins' *Essay* are from the copy held at Gladstone's Library, Hawarden, Flintshire.

These invented languages were of the 'a priori' type, that is, derived from first principles rather than being based on any existing languages. Francis Bacon (1561-1626), for instance, discussed the development of a 'real character', symbols which, by agreement, would represent the order of the world, although Descartes (1596-1650), thought such a project out of reach.[11] A group of scholars based initially at

[11] A. v. Blyenberch, 'Bacon, Francis, Viscount St Alban (1561–1626)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 September 2004. https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-

Oxford pursued the idea of a 'real character' and 'philosophical language' which would act as a mirror of reality and of human knowledge.[12] These included the astronomer Seth Ward (1717-1689), who explored the idea of 'simple notions' into which all discourse could be analysed, and George Dalgarno (c.1616-1687), who listed over 900 'radicals' or root words with symbols and published his *Ars Signorum* in 1661.[13] John Wilkins for a while worked with Dalgarno but went on to develop his own schema, discussed in greater detail in the next section.[14] As was clear in the Preface to his *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language* (1856), Edmonds was familiar with the work of Wilkins and Ward and knew of Dalgarno's work although he had not been able to find a copy.[15]

Wilkins' achievement was taken very seriously by his fellows in the Royal Society, who set up a Royal Commission to consider its development and contributed to the taxonomic tables. Other contemporaries also showed an interest: Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) purchased a copy.[16] However, the work was not taken further forward, proving too cumbersome. The tables were themselves an extraordinary achievement and the taxonomic approach was later used in, for example, Roget's *Thesaurus*.[17] Parallel explorations of language and categorisation in other parts of Europe led

e-1004808 (Accessed 23 July 2020); Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes,* pp. 65-66; Lewis, *Language, Mind and Nature,* pp. 12-14; Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages,* pp. 36-7.

[12] Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes,* pp. 73-74.

[13] J. Henry, 'Ward, Seth (1617–1689), astronomer and bishop of Exeter and Salisbury', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-28706 (Accessed 23 July 2020); D. Cram, 'Dalgarno, George (c. 1616–1687), writer on language', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-7023 (Accessed 23 July 2020).

[14] Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages*, pp. 45-50.

[15] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language,* p. i.

[16] Eco, *Search for the Perfect Language*, p. 229; C. Tomalin, *Samuel Pepys: the Unequalled Self* (London: Viking, 2002), p. 256.

[17] Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages*, pp. 71-2.

towards the French *Encyclopédie* or, in the case of Leibniz's 1678 essay 'Lingua Generalis', towards calculus.[18]

Other voices were more sceptical. John Locke (1632-1704) urged greater care and precision in using existing languages rather than the construction of a new one, considering the task of fixing words to concepts 'Not easy to be made so'.[19] Edmonds had certainly read Locke, using a relevant extract from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in his own *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language* and so must have been aware of this viewpoint.[20] In the Preface to his *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language*, Edmonds makes clear that he had also read the works of the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Thomas Reid (1710–1796), and his follower William Hamilton (1788–1856), both of whom thought the barriers to a universal language insuperable.[21] However, he was not put off either by these warnings or by the satirical treatments given to the philosophical language project by Jonathan Swift and Voltaire with which he was surely familiar.[22] Positive attempts had continued alongside scepticism: Umberto Eco notes several proposals

[18] Eco, *Search for the Perfect Language*, pp. 269 – 292; 'Gottfried Leibniz' (1646-1716), https://history-computer.com/Dreamers/Leibniz.html (accessed 23 September 2019).
[19] J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Fontana, 1964) [1690], Book III, Chapter XI, pp.318-319; J. Milton, 'Locke, John (1632–1704), philosopher', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-16885 (Accessed 23 July 2020).
[20] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language,* Book II, pp. 25-33.
[21] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language,* pp. ii-iv.; P. Wood, 'Reid, Thomas (1710–1796), natural and moral philosopher', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-23342 (Accessed 23 July 2020); A. Ryan, 'Hamilton, Sir William Stirling, baronet (1788–1856), philosopher', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-12144. (Accessed 23 July 2020).
[22] J. Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (London: Penguin, 2001) [1726], p. 172; Voltaire, *Candide, or Optimism* (London: Penguin, 2005) [1759]. Swift's Gulliver visits the Grand Academy of Lagado where sages carry around numerous objects to use in place of words, while the ever-optimistic Dr Pangloss in Voltaire's *Candide* is named to refer to Leibniz's support for the idea of a universal language.

in the late eighteenth century, which were spurred on by notions of universal brotherhood as well as by colonial expansion.[23]

Interest in linguistic reform can be traced within the Birmingham environment in which Edmonds moved as a young man. Joseph Priestley's influence on local education continued even after he had left the town, including his advocacy of the study of language and literature.[24] Priestley's popular *The Rudiments of English Grammar,* published originally in 1761 and reissued many times in the following decades, could well have been used by Reverend Edward Edmonds and in George's schools.[25] More significant for the development of Edmonds' lifelong interest would have been Priestley's *Lectures on the Theory of Language and Universal Grammar*, reproduced from a course of lectures he had given in Warrington.[26] This work contains more in-depth treatment of aspects of grammar than was possible in his popular textbook. It also touches on wider questions such as the problems caused by the fact that in the orthography of modern languages 'the pronunciation doth not correspond with the writing'.[27]

Priestley went on to discuss the diversity of languages and, while acknowledging the story of the Tower of Babel, suggested that 'it is no impiety to suppose that this...[diversity of languages]…might have been brought about by natural means'.[28] There were, he suggested, some advantages in this diversity, for instance, the study of different languages could improve the use of grammar and promote a deeper

[23] Eco, *Search for the Perfect Language*, pp. 293-302.
[24] R. Watts, 'Joseph Priestley and his influence on education in Birmingham', in M. Dick (ed.), *Joseph Priestley and Birmingham* (Studley: Brewin Books, 2005), pp. 48-64.
[25] J. Priestley, *The Rudiments of English Grammar* 3rd ed. (London: J. and F. Rivington, 1772).
[26] J. Priestley, *A Course of Lectures on the Theory of Language and Universal Grammar* (Warrington, 1762).
[27] Priestley, *Lectures on the Theory of Language,* p. 43.
[28] Priestley*, Lectures on the Theory of Language,* p. 288.

understanding of concepts.[29] Nevertheless, the project of constructing 'one philosophical language' free of superfluities and ambiguities, was worthwhile. He thought Wilkins' attempt was the most rational so far; he supported the idea of using a taxonomy but thought it needed a more perfect distribution of things into classes. Crucially, a deeper understanding of the science of language was needed.[30] Priestley's work, then, provided some encouragement to a young man like Edmonds but also flagged up some warnings.

Jeremy Bentham was another admirer of Wilkins who was nevertheless sceptical about his proposed approach. Although Bentham's *Fragments on a Universal Grammar* were not published until 1844, there is some relevant discussion in his proposal for new forms of instruction in *Chrestomathia*, published in 1816. Bentham was impressed by the achievement of John Wilkins but commented that learning such a completely new language posed too many difficulties. It would be better to adapt and enhance one of the existing European languages.[31] Here Bentham suggests an 'a posteriori' approach, the route eventually taken by language creators in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The educationalist Thomas Wright Hill, with whose family Edmonds was closely acquainted, maintained an interest in both spoken and written language.[32] Hill's 'Lecture on the Articulation of Speech' was given to the Birmingham Philosophical Society in January 1821. He proposed a method of explaining the pronunciation of letters which could help those learning other languages as well as improving the use

[29] Priestley*, Lectures on the Theory of Language,* pp. 292-4.
[30] Priestley, *Lectures on the Theory of Language,* pp. 287-302.
[31] J. Bentham, 'Chrestomathia' [1816] in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, Vol. 8 (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843), pp. 150-151.
[32] T.W. Hill, *Selections from the Papers of the late Thomas Wright Hill* (London: J W Parker, 1860). See Appendix C and Chapter Four for Edmonds and the Hill family.

of English.[33] This may have reflected a concern that provincial users of English, such as his Birmingham audience, should not be disadvantaged by their pronunciation. Hill also developed a form of shorthand that eventually became a complete phonetic alphabet. He worked on this from the early part of the century onwards and would have been discussing these ideas in the period when Edmonds was in regular contact with the Hill family.[34]

Interest in the diversity of languages was not confined to rational educationalists like Priestley and Hill. This was illustrated in a well-attended talk given by Reverend Thomas Morgan at the Bond Street Society for Mental Improvement in 1829.[35] Reverend Morgan discussed the language of Eden and outlined alternative explanations for the later multiplicity of languages, arguing that the biblical account in Genesis was to be preferred. The Baptists' wider concerns were reflected in Morgan's reference to the fact that Baptist missionaries had translated the Bible into many different languages and dialects. This meeting shows that the diversity of languages, and the need to overcome barriers to spreading the gospel, was a topic being discussed among Edmonds' fellow church members.

Edmonds' internationalist outlook developed beyond its Baptist origins to include uncompromising abolitionism, a critical attitude to some aspects of imperial expansion, and a search for peaceful solutions to conflict.[36] This outlook might have contributed to his interest in an international language. It is likely, too, that the issue would have been discussed by local radical co-thinkers. Robert Owen's ideals

[33] Hill, 'A Lecture on the Articulation of Speech Delivered before the Birmingham Philosophical Society on January 29th 1821' in Hill, *Selections from Papers*, pp. 8-34.
[34] Hill, 'A Brief Account of the system of short-hand invented by Mr T.W. Hill,' in Hill, *Selections from Papers*, pp. 54-61; T. Cooper, revised C. Creffield, 'Thomas Wright Hill' (*ODNB*, 2004).
[35] BA&C 405835, *Minute Book for the Use of the Bond St Society for Mental Improvement,* pp. 65-67. This Society is described in Chapter Three.
[36] See Chapters Six and Nine.

encompassed a single international language and Edmonds, although not a committed follower of Owen, had shown interest in his ideas and was a friend of Owenite sympathisers W.H. Smith and William Pare.[37] There may have been an element of utopian internationalism in Edmonds' thinking about a new language.

Edmonds grew up with an interest in the use and development of language and in contact with others of like mind. His motivations for inventing a new alphabet and language might have included religious conviction, internationalist sentiment and belief in educational improvement as well as an early interest in the nature and process of language. He was not put off by the doubts expressed by thinkers, including Locke and Priestley. This attitude, together with the time he devoted to these projects, might also indicate an obsession. To explore this aspect further, it is necessary to examine his two published works on these topics in more detail.

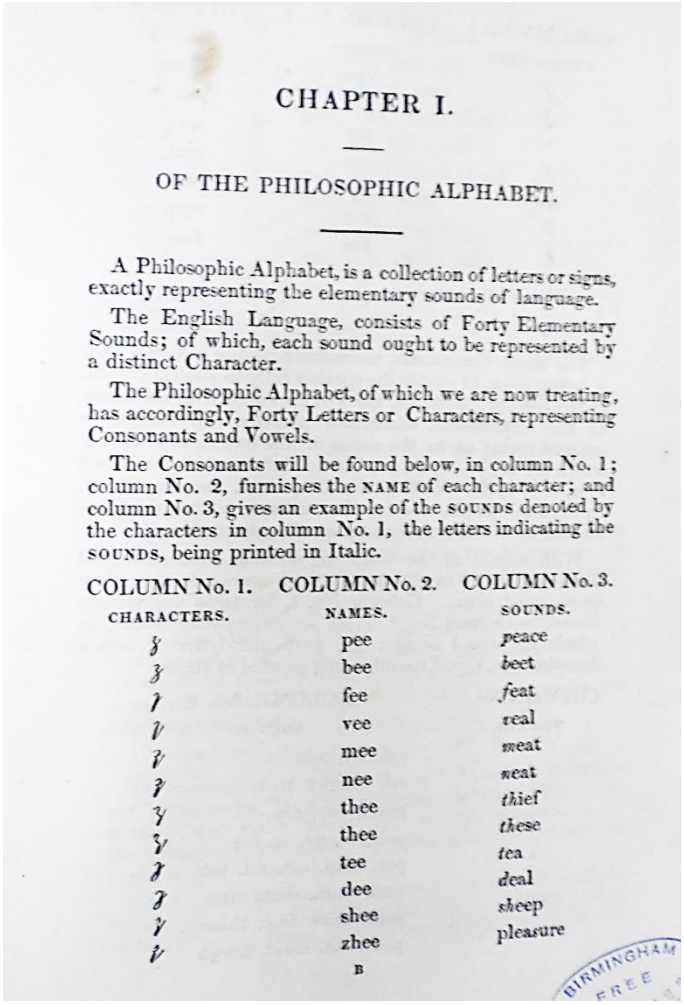
Edmonds' two publications

Edmonds published his *Philosophic Alphabet* in 1832. The book contained an alphabet and system of punctuation designed from first principles.[38] Its stated aims were primarily educational, to improve pronunciation and the use of language:

> The Philosophic Alphabet is a matter of great importance; it will lead to consequences affecting the whole family of mankind; … it will, in a few years, effect a most important change. The pronunciation of the lowest orders of society, will, as this character is used, become perfectly free from provincialisms, vulgarisms, and corruptions of every sort.[39]

[37] H.G. Macnab, 'The New Views of Mr Owen of Lanark Impartially Examined [1819]' in G. Claeys (ed.), *Owenite Socialism Pamphlets and Correspondence,* Vol.1 (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 116. See Chapter Six.
[38] Edmonds, *The Philosophic Alphabet*.
[39] Edmonds, *The Philosophic Alphabet,* p. iv.

Edmonds here combined great claims for his invention with a practical concern for plebeian writers and speakers. Like Thomas Hill, he was aware of the disadvantages that attended those using provincial accents and turns of phrase. He also suggested that the alphabet would help those who could not afford lessons in a foreign language because, he argued, his alphabet was designed to be used in many different languages and was easy to master.[40]



CHAPTER I.

OF THE PHILOSOPHIC ALPHABET.

A Philosophic Alphabet, is a collection of letters or signs, exactly representing the elementary sounds of language.

The English Language, consists of Forty Elementary Sounds; of which, each sound ought to be represented by a distinct Character.

The Philosophic Alphabet, of which we are now treating, has accordingly, Forty Letters or Characters, representing Consonants and Vowels.

The Consonants will be found below, in column No. 1; column No. 2, furnishes the NAME of each character; and column No. 3, gives an example of the SOUNDS denoted by the characters in column No. 1, the letters indicating the SOUNDS, being printed in Italic.

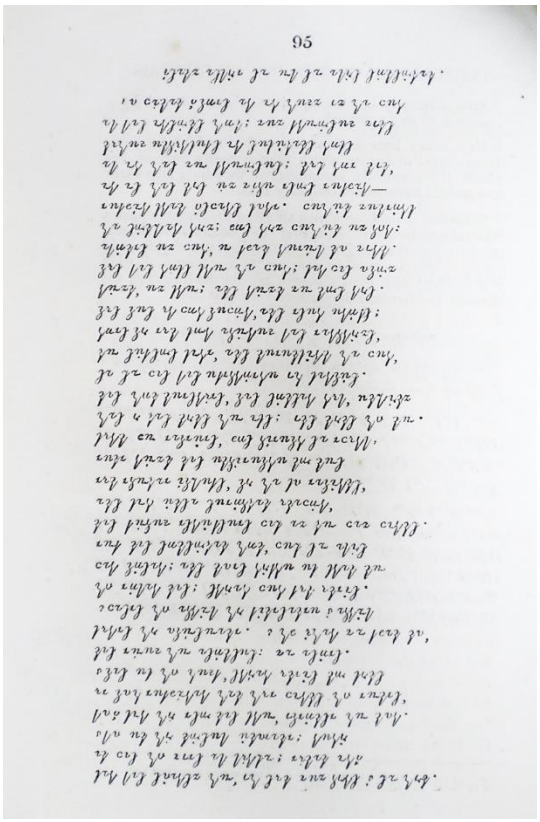
COLUMN No. 1. CHARACTERS.	COLUMN No. 2. NAMES.	COLUMN No. 3. SOUNDS.
	pee	*peace*
	bee	*beet*
	fee	*feat*
	vee	*veal*
	mee	*meat*
	nee	*neat*
	thee	*thief*
	thee	*these*
	tee	*tea*
	dee	*deal*
	shee	*sheep*
	zhee	pleasure

<u>Figure 8.2</u> Edmonds' *Philosophic Alphabet* (1832)

Images from the *Philosophic Alphabet* are taken from the copy held by the Library of Birmingham

[40] Edmonds, *The Philosophic Alphabet,* p. 75.

Edmonds' phonetic alphabet had forty basic characters with certain features designed to produce consistency; for instance, similar-sounding consonants were close in appearance (Figure 8.2).[41] The characters, Edmonds wrote later, were designed to indicate 'by their very forms…the natural relation and circumstances of the organs of speech'.[42] Edmonds proposed five marks to be used in front of a sentence to indicate its type, whether assertive, interrogative, directive, optative or exclamative, and he suggested four kinds of commas, to be used in different kinds of pauses. An explanation of these uses led to a detailed grammatical discussion.[43]



<u>Figure 8.3</u> Extract from 'Paradise Lost' in the *Philosophic Alphabet*

[41] Edmonds, *The Philosophic Alphabet,* pp. 1-2.
[42] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language*, p. v.
[43] Edmonds, *The Philosophic Alphabet,* pp. 27-59.

The last section contains examples of the alphabet in use. Edmonds translated several literary extracts and aphorisms (Figure 8.3). He also engaged the help of local scholars to translate examples from other languages: Reverend Rann Kennedy for Greek, Professor Levi Chapman for Hebrew, Abate Minichini for Italian, Mr Muro for Spanish and M. Martin for French. Edmonds added, perhaps with some pride, that all the gentlemen resided in Birmingham.[44]

The production of the *Philosophic Alphabet* also reflected Edmonds' interest in the printing process. As a young man, with his friend Joseph Dixon, he had attempted to create a new machine for composing type. He had maintained a printing press in his Union Street rooms at the height of radical activity in 1819.[45] In 1832 he registered another machine, declaring that he intended to 'take on the business of a letter founder or maker and setter of types for printing', at his Whittall Street address.[46] This referred to the machine designed to produce his new Philosophic Alphabet. Edmonds registered a patent for this in April 1832 'for...a new arrangement of letters, forms or figures, by which the articulate sounds of languages may be scientifically denoted'.[47] In his Introduction to the *Philosophic Alphabet* Edmonds explained that he had not been able to use a professional letter founder because of the need to preserve secrecy while he waited for the patent. This meant that the punches were less than adequate. His nephew William Rollason, who was 'without previous

[44] Edmonds, *The Philosophic Alphabet,* 'To the Reader.'
[45] See Chapters Three and Five.
[46] Warwickshire County Record Office (WCRO); Warwickshire Printing Press Owners Records; Reference Number: *QS73*; Microfilm: *PG3282;* Ancestry.com. *Warwickshire, England, Occupational and Quarter Session Records, 1662-1866* [database on-line].
[47] *Mechanic's Magazine, Museum, Register, Journal & Gazette* (Knight and Lacey, 1832).

experience', had cast the type from matrices manufactured by himself on Edmonds' premises.[48]

The *Philosophic Alphabet* was advertised widely, both in the local and London press, but it has not been possible to trace any evidence of its reception; it seems to have fallen on stony ground.[49] A close inspection of the alphabet and the examples given suggests that the very elements which Edmonds considered ground-breaking – giving closely allied consonants a similarity in appearance, and using small marks to designate types of sentences – made the system unworkable. Edmonds later wrote, in the Preface to the *Universal Alphabet*, that although he considered his Alphabet 'theoretically, a near approach to perfection', he had to conclude that 'mankind would never enter on a Philosophic Language through that portal'.[50] Edmonds, however, was ever one to survive a setback and after several other attempts at creating a new alphabet, he began work on his *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language*, which was eventually published in 1856.He became convinced that Wilkins' approach, which aligned words to concepts, was the right one, whatever the difficulties.[51]

John Wilkins, who came from a moderate puritan background, managed to navigate the periods of both Commonwealth and Restoration as Warden of Wadham College, Oxford. He maintained his latitudinarian theological outlook while acting as Dean of Ripon Cathedral and then Bishop of Chester. He also pursued wide scientific interests and was a founder member and secretary of the Royal Society.[52] The first draft of his work on a new language was lost in the Great Fire of London, but his

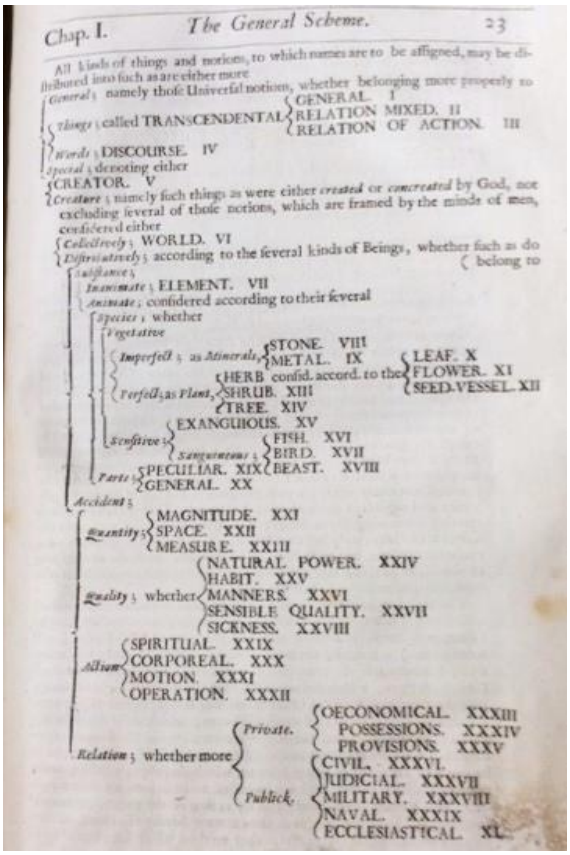
[48] William Rollason, a young tin-plate worker, was the son of Harriet, Patience Edmonds' sister, and John Rollason, a vellum binder. See Appendix C.
[49] *BJ,* 25 August 1832; *London Courier and Evening Gazette,* 6 September 1832; *Bell's New Weekly Messenger,* 9 September 1832.
[50] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language*, Preface, p. v.
[51] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language*, Preface, pp. v-vi.
[52] J. Henry, 'John Wilkins (1614-1672), theologian and natural philosopher,' *ODNB*, 2004.

Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language was finally published in 1668.[53] The *Essay* has an Introduction followed by four Parts; William Lloyd's *Alphabetical Dictionary* is bound with it. In the *Epistle Dedicatory* Wilkins made considerable claims for his scheme, although acknowledging it to be a provisional attempt. He explained that the work was much more than a dictionary but was a way of organising real knowledge. Besides this great scientific aim, the new scheme would be conducive to spreading the knowledge of religion and would 'clear some of our modern differences' in that field, a comment that sounds like a heartfelt plea from the latitudinarian cleric.[54] Both of these aims – the organisation of knowledge and the bringing of clarity to discussion – would appeal to Edmonds and appear as powerful reasons for his following in Wilkins' footsteps despite the scepticism expressed by critics.[55]

In the first Part of the *Essay*, Wilkins sketched the origins, diversity and defects of natural language. The new scheme would be 'a real universal character' which would 'signify things and notions'.[56] These would need organising in a 'just enumeration'.[57] This is provided in the second Part, the 'Universal Philosophy', a taxonomic tree intended to represent a rational classification of every concept, thing, and action in the universe.[58] The General Schema has forty genera, further sub-divided into species and differences (Figure 8.4).[59]

[53] J. Wilkins, *Essay towards a Real Character.*
[54] Wilkins, *Essay towards a Real Character*, 'Epistle Dedicatory'.
[55] As noted in the previous section, sceptics included Locke, Reid, Hamilton and Priestley.
[56] Wilkins, *Essay towards a Real Character,* Chapters One to Five; Lewis, pp. 155-159.
[57] Wilkins, *Essay towards a Real Character*, p. 19.
[58] This uses an Aristotelian system of categories in the form of a Porphyrian tree; Lewis, *Language, Mind and Nature*, pp. 160-1; Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages,* pp. 38-9.
[59] Wilkins, *Essay towards a Real Character*, pp. 22-30.

After explaining the broad principles, Wilkins laid out tables of concepts and things, and these make up the largest section of the book.[60] In this way the placing of a thing within the tables contributes to understanding its nature.[61] For example, a cat is part of the category 'Beasts': sanguineous, sensitive, animate creatures, according to the Schema (Figure 8.4). Beasts are further sub-divided in Chapter V, and 'Cat' can be found in the category of 'rapacious beasts of the cat kind'. Here we find: 'That domestic animal, the enemy to mice.'[62]



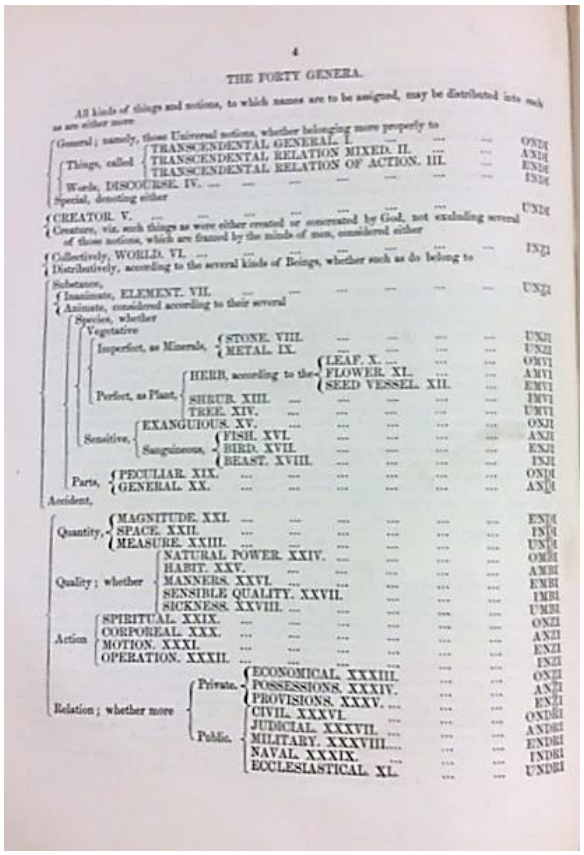


Figure 8.4 Wilkins' Genera **Figure 8.5 Edmonds' Genera**

The two are shown together for comparison.

Edmonds' Genera are taken from the *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language*, see Fig 8.8

[60] Wilkins, *Essay towards a Real Character*, pp. 51-288.
[61] Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes,* p. 99.
[62] Wilkins, *Essay towards a Real Character*, p. 159.

The Third Part is the 'Philosophical Grammar'. Here Wilkins demonstrated how different parts of speech might be derived from the concepts listed in the tables. He also made clear that although he would use the nominative-verb-accusative system, verbs would not have a separate existence but be created by using the concepts linked to the copula (the verb 'to be') with signs for tense and mood.[63] The Fourth Part included both the 'real character' and a guide to pronunciation. In the real character, marks were assigned to each genus and these could be further amended to indicate the place of an object within the tree. In this way a thing was not only given a name but defined. Once the real character had been 'made effable' using the pronunciation scheme, spoken words were created: this was the 'Philosophical Language' (Figure 8.6).

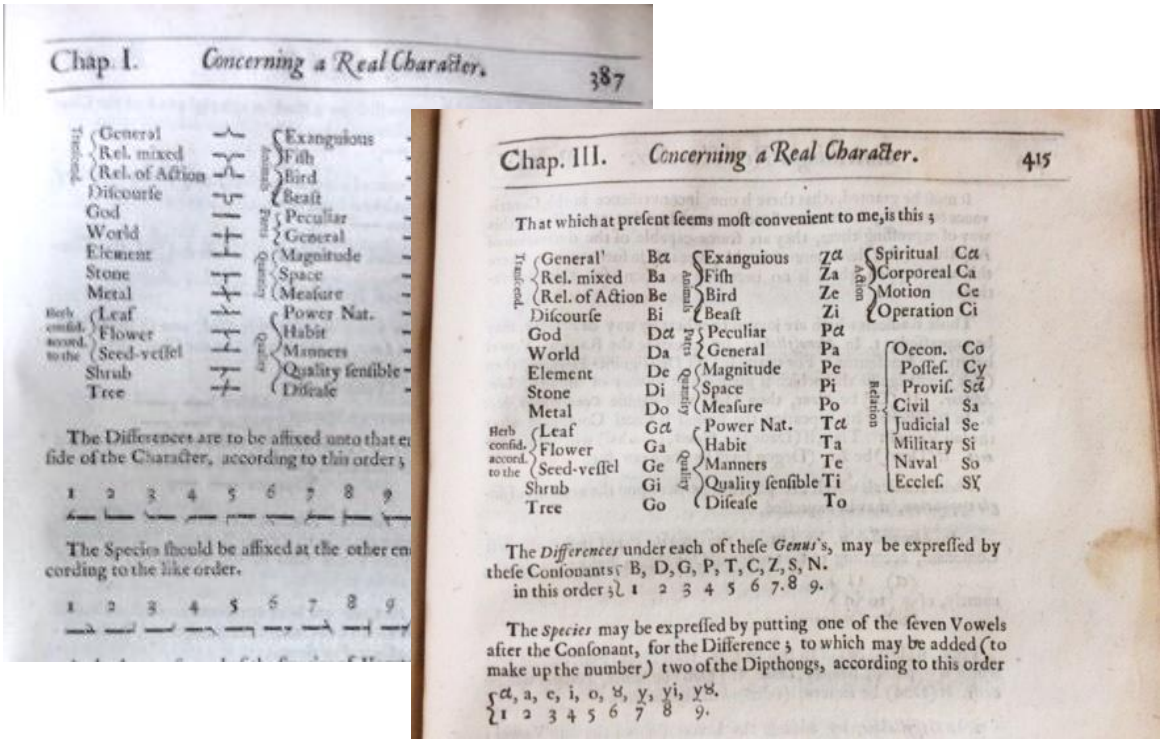


Figure 8.6 Wilkins' Real Character and Pronunciation Scheme

[63] Lewis, *Language, Mind and Nature,* pp. 171-2; Wilkins, *Essay,* p. 304.

Wilkins provided several examples of both the real character and of the complete use of the Philosophical Language. The Lord's Prayer is shown in Figure 8.7 in both the real character, and in the version that can be spoken.

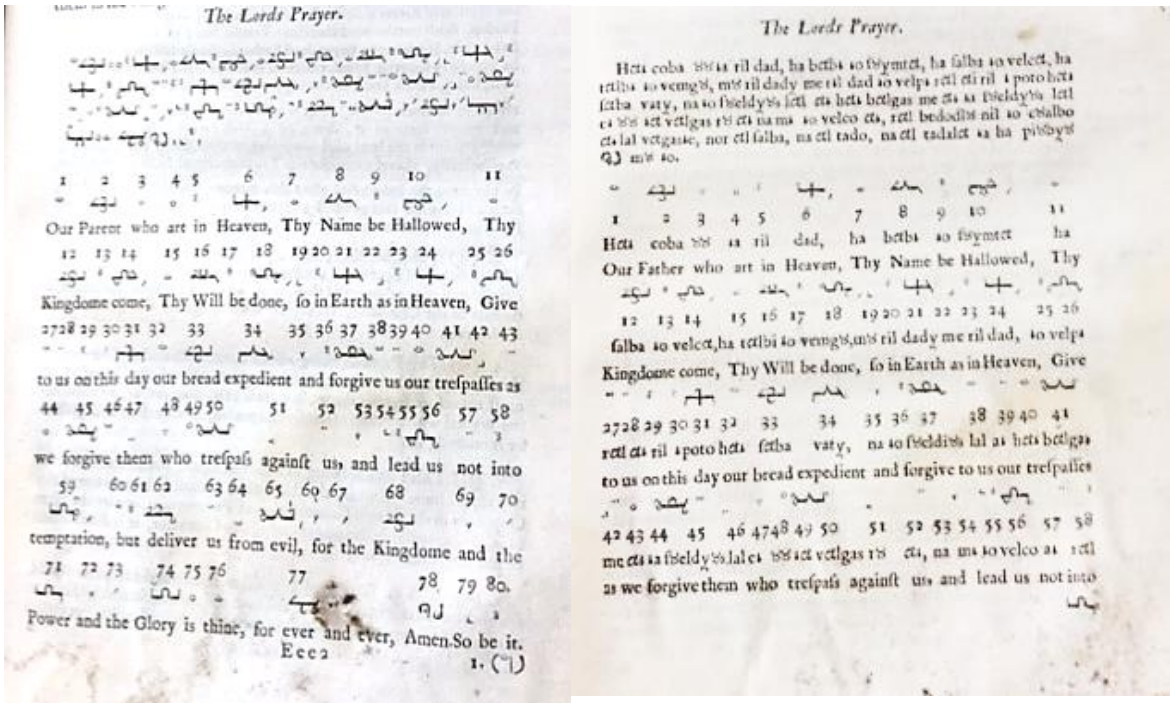


Figure 8.7 The Lord's Prayer in Wilkins' Real Character

Wilkins made a conscious decision to use the immediate form of things in his genera, so that his language defined the words in a practical, useful way. He acknowledged that this was not 'perfect knowledge', but could be a useful way of training minds and communicating between peoples.[64] His scheme has the advantages of providing definitions and a form that can potentially be understood by people with different first languages, but it is cumbersome to use. It was made more practicable by William Lloyd's *Alphabetical Dictionary*.[65] However, it was not practical

[64] Lewis, *Language, Mind and Nature,* pp. 164-5.
[65] W. Lloyd, *Alphabetical Dictionary*, bound with Wilkins' *Essay.*

enough, and the attempts by Royal Society members to carry on the work after Wilkins' death petered out.[66]

Despite this outcome, and despite the scepticism of Locke and others, Edmonds based his schema on that of Wilkins, adopting the latter's taxonomy pretty much wholesale (Figure 8.5). He considered that Wilkins' language had failed because of specific weaknesses within it rather than because all such attempts were futile. The problem, he believed, lay in the difficulties of transition from the silent 'Real Character' to the 'Philosophical Language' and from the fact that the Philosophical Language itself was not fluent and pleasant to the ear. The Lords' Prayer, one of the examples given by Wilkins, was to Edmonds' ears, intolerable 'and utterly destitute of those qualities, which, even in vulgar languages, are sometimes pleasant'.[67]

Edmonds' solution was two-fold. First, he did not employ a 'real character' but directly represented the concepts with letters and words using a modified form of the Roman alphabet. The alphabet was supplemented by certain marks 'so as to represent all the elemental sounds of language'.[68] His new language was centred on the use of the short vowels, 'u' and 'i', and the consonants 'm,' 'n' and 'n' (standing for the sound 'ng').[69] When he reproduced Wilkins' forty genera, he gave them names using his new language; each of these radicals included one of his three critical consonants.[70] For example 'nj' is found in all the names for Beasts, PNJAZ is 'rapacious beasts of the cat kind' and Ki'nja is a cat.[71] This follows Wilkins' model but has the advantage of producing an actual word from the start.

[66] Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes*, pp. 103-7.
[67] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language*, Preface, p. vx.
[68] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language,* Preface, p. v; Book I, p. 1.
[69] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language,* Preface, p. vi.
[70] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language,* Book I, p. 4.
[71] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language*, Book I, p. 25 and Introduction, pp. 23-4.

Different parts of speech, including verbs, can be made from each substantive by following set rules. Letters or combinations of letters are used to indicate adverbs, prepositions and so forth and can be added to the base word.[72] Most of Book I is taken up with tables derived from the radical words, much like those of Wilkins, followed by details of the words, prefixes and suffixes which indicate parts of speech and examples of how to form them.[73] Book II has a number of translations made by Edmonds, from both sacred and secular sources, for example, from *The Gospel according to Saint John*, from various thinkers such as Bacon and Locke, and from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.[74] Book III is a substantial dictionary.

Edmonds outlined several advantages of his philosophic language and these provide additional clues about his motivations. The alphabet, he suggested, was easy to acquire, each word was confined to one meaning, the language was 'literal' and any metaphorical use would be indicated by a special mark. All words were arranged according to the concepts that they represented. This logical approach would improve habits of thought. Children would be trained up with a love of truth and order and develop 'a hatred of nonsense, of falsehood, of hypocrisy, double-entendre, cant and grandiloquence'.[75] Here, Edmonds suggested that improving education and understanding was a key intention. His description of the language as 'A Philosophic Language for the Nations' suggests that international communication continued to be in his sights.[76] He did not draw any direct line between his religious convictions and the use of the language or refer, as Wilkins had, to the spreading of the gospel. There is evidence of his faith in many of the examples chosen for translation, but so

[72] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language*, Introduction, pp. 24-31.
[73] For example, the table of prepositions; Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language*, pp. 79-82.
[74] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language*, Book II.
[75] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language*, Introduction, pp. 22-24.
[76] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language,* Table of Contents, p. iii.

there is of his wide reading in the classics and secular literature. He did, however, feel a divine hand at work when it came to his insights concerning the sounds of a Philosophic Language: 'I have long felt as though I had been no more than a mere instrument, accomplishing the will of another.'[77]

Edmonds' two epigraphs, one sacred and one secular, also cast light on his motivations (Figure 8.8). The first is from the Old Testament book of Zephaniah: 'For then will I turn to the people a PURE LANGUAGE that they may all call on the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent', a verse which can be read as having an ecumenical, as well as evangelical, content.[78] The second is from Locke:

> And here I desire it may be considered, and carefully examined, whether the greatest part of the disputes in the world are not merely verbal, and about the meaning of words; and whether, if the terms in which they are expressed were defined, … those disputes would not end of themselves, and immediately vanish.[79]

Edmonds here chose an extract from the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter XI, which illustrates Locke's desire for clarity and understanding. Perhaps tellingly, in his choice of material from Locke's *Essay* for one of his translated passages (Book III, Chapter X) Edmonds omitted the section headed 'Not easy to be made so', a section which outlined the difficulties of a universal language and recommended communication and discussion as more effective routes to mutual understanding.[80]

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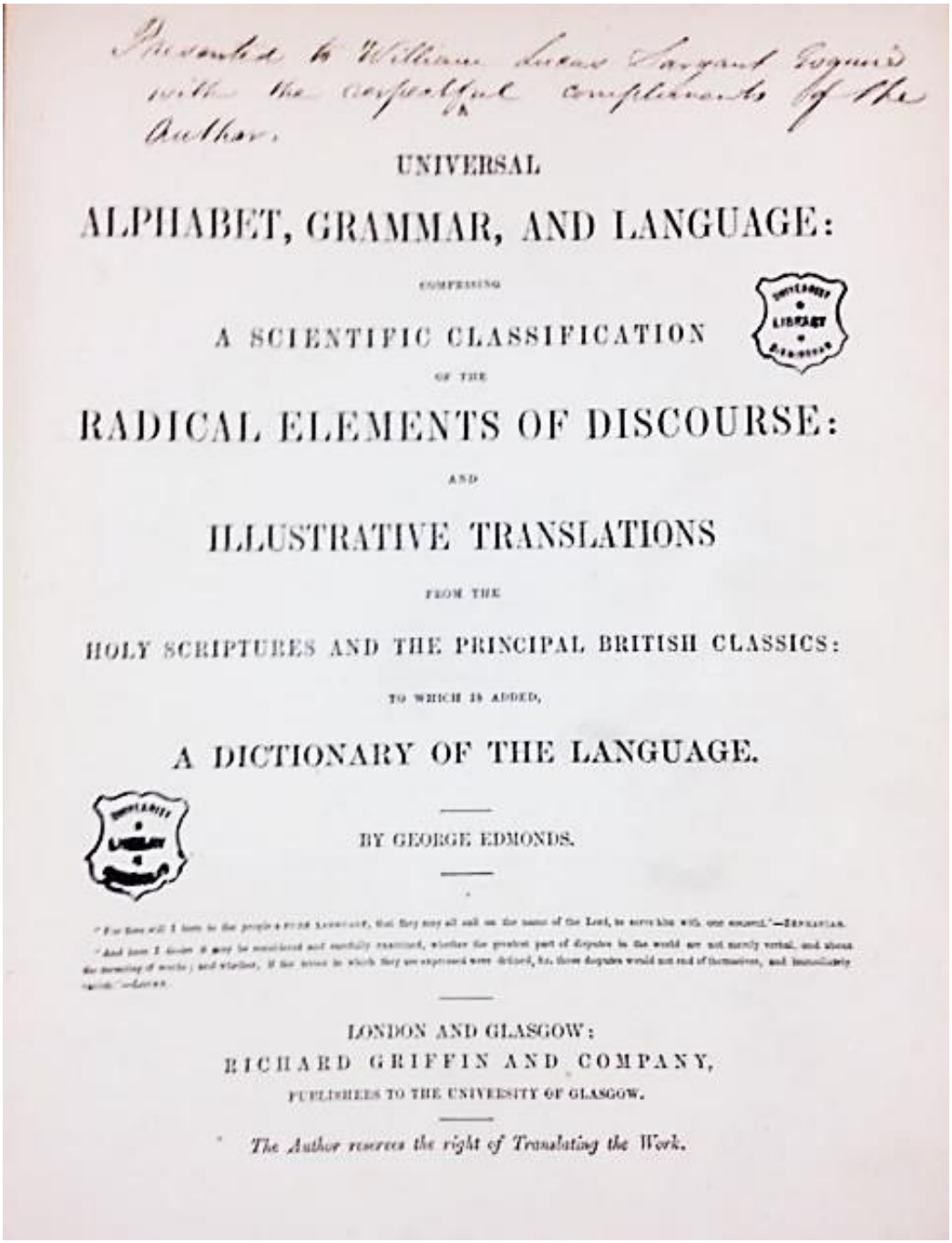
[77] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language,* Preface, p. vi.
[78] Zephaniah, Chapter 3, Verse 9.
[79] Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter XI.
[80] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language*, Book II, pp. 29-33; Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter X.



Presented to William Lucas Sargant Esquire with the respectful compliments of the Author.

UNIVERSAL

ALPHABET, GRAMMAR, AND LANGUAGE:

COMPRISING

A SCIENTIFIC CLASSIFICATION

OF THE

RADICAL ELEMENTS OF DISCOURSE:

AND

ILLUSTRATIVE TRANSLATIONS

FROM THE

HOLY SCRIPTURES AND THE PRINCIPAL BRITISH CLASSICS:

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A DICTIONARY OF THE LANGUAGE.

BY GEORGE EDMONDS.

"For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call on the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent."—ZEPHANIAH.

"And how I desire it may be considered and carefully examined, whether the greatest part of disputes in the world are not merely verbal, and about the meaning of words; and whether, if the sense in which they are expressed were defined, &c. those disputes would not end of themselves, and immediately vanish."—LOCKE.

LONDON AND GLASGOW:

RICHARD GRIFFIN AND COMPANY,

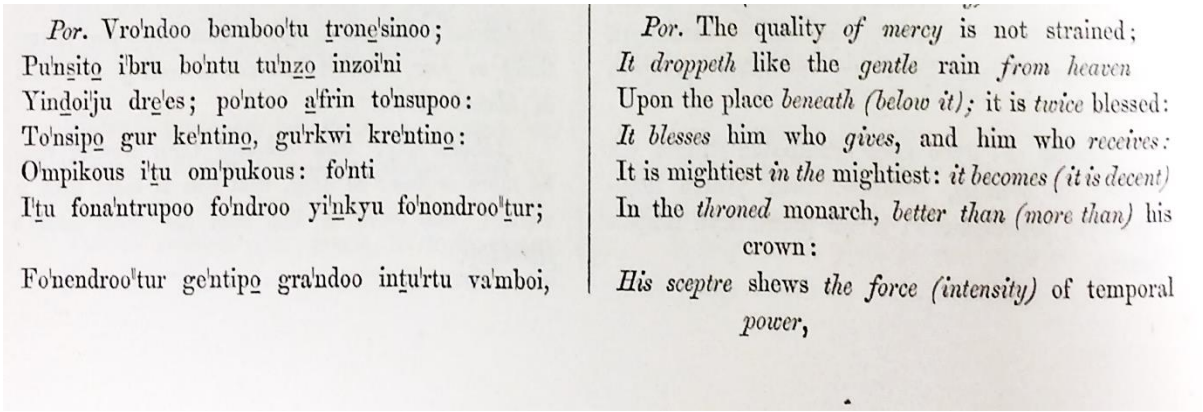
PUBLISHERS TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW.

The Author reserves the right of Translating the Work.

<u>Figure 8.8</u> Frontispiece, Edmonds' *Universal Alphabet, Grammar, and Language* (1856)

Images of Edmonds' *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language* are from the copy held by the Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham

Whatever the claims made by Edmonds for the logical structure of his language, it had several drawbacks. Many words sound similar. It is particularly difficult to distinguish prefixes and suffixes in either appearance or, presumably, sound. Despite Edmonds' claims that the Alphabet and Language would be easy to acquire, the text is difficult to follow and unwieldy. In addition, although Edmonds thought that his language sounded attractive and a great improvement on that of Wilkins, it has to be said that the sound is not mellifluous, as illustrated in the translation of Portia's speech, Act IV, Scene I, *The Merchant of Venice* (Figure 8.9).[81] Indeed, these were the very criticisms advanced by contemporary critics, as outlined below.



Por. Vro'ndoo bemboo'tu tron'sinoo;
Pu'nsito i'bru bo'ntu tu'nzo inzoi'ni
Yindoi'ju dre'es; po'ntoo a'frin to'nsupoo:
To'nsipo gur ke'ntino, gu'rkwi kre'ntino:
O'mpikous i'tu om'pukous: fo'nti
I'tu fona'ntrupoo fo'ndroo yi'nkyu fo'nondroo'tur;

Fo'nendroo'tur ge'ntipo gra'ndoo intu'rtu va'mboi,

Por. The quality *of mercy* is not strained;
It droppeth like the *gentle* rain *from heaven*
Upon the place *beneath (below it);* it is *twice* blessed:
It blesses him who *gives*, and him who *receives:*
It is mightiest *in the* mightiest: *it becomes (it is decent)*
In the *throned* monarch, *better than (more than)* his crown:
His sceptre shews *the force (intensity)* of temporal *power*,

Figure 8.9 Portia's 'Quality of Mercy' speech in Edmonds' Universal Language

Once again, Edmonds used his own resources in the production. Edmonds himself cut and cast a fount of types at his Whittall Street home and these were executed by Fergusons of Edinburgh. The whole was printed by another family associate, the

[81] Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language,* Book II, p. 22.

printer Edward Massey, the brother of Edmonds' brother-in-law and clerk, Timothy Massey.[82]

Edmonds adopted a schema that had an internal logic and was based on the best known of the 'a priori' universal languages. This reflected his interest in grammatical processes and testified to his considerable intellectual abilities. However, he could not grasp the unwieldiness of his scheme; perhaps he became so entangled that he could not stand back and take a clear-eyed view. Although, unlike George Eliot's character from *Middlemarch*, the Reverend Casaubon, he spent most of his days out in the world, socially and political engaged, he shared that character's obsessive behaviour and obstinate belief in his project.

Reception and impact

Edmonds presented his 'Universal Language' prior to publication of his book, at a meeting of the Geography and Ethnology section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in Glasgow in September 1855.[83] The very fact that such a session took place suggests that the topic was of interest in scholarly circles. Another author, A. Ellis, introduced his own invention at the same time as Edmonds and 'a warm discussion followed, the general tone of which was very complimentary to Mr Edmonds'.[84] There were warning voices about the practicality of Edmonds' proposal, but this reception must have given him some encouragement.

The *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language* was published early the following year and was well advertised.[85] Its immediate reception was mixed, but at least the

[82] Edwards, *'George Edmonds'*; Edmonds, *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language*, Preface, p. vii. For Edward Massey, see Appendix C.
[83] *BJ*, 10 October 1855.
[84] *Belfast Mercury,* 22 September 1855.
[85] For example, *Dublin Evening Post,* 12 February 1856.

book was widely, and, for the most part, seriously reviewed. The first local reviewer referred to it as an 'elaborate and highly ingenious work', and, in an aside which suggested that Edmonds' book was already the subject of local jesting, warned readers against being deterred by 'flippant criticism'. The work was worth reading for its philosophical discussions, the reviewer thought, but Edmonds' proposed solutions to the problems associated with Wilkins' approach were unconvincing. His new system of sounds was neither more melodious nor did it accord more closely to the concepts expressed.[86] Letters followed in the *Journal*, praising Edmonds for his attempt to reduce and characterise the forty different sounds, but arguing that his constant use of the three nasal consonants m, n and ng produced words which were tiresome to the ear and difficult to differentiate.[87]

Reviews in the national journals were along the same lines but less circumspect. The reviewer in the *Athenaeum* thought the book no more than an intellectual curiosity and adopted a tone of mild irony: others might have failed but 'Mr Edmonds is made of sterner stuff'. The reviewer further objected that Edmond's language was hardly universal, given that he adopted the English alphabet as a basis: 'Mr Edmonds is facetious about Bishop Wilkins' silent language but keeps his own language for Englishmen.'[88] A review in the *Quarterly Review* shared the scepticism, arguing that while the book showed considerable labour and ingenuity, the underlying principles appeared to be 'fantastic and unscientific'.[89] *The Critic* gave the

[86] *BJ,* 29 March 1856, also available in BA&C, Birmingham Scrapbook, Vol. 1, Part Two A.
[87] *BJ*, 12 April, 24 May 1856.
[88] *The Athenaeum,* No. 1490, 17 May 1856, pp. 609 – 610, 'A Universal Alphabet, Grammar, and Language.'
[89] *British Quarterly Review,* October 1856, pp. 558- 559, 'A Universal Alphabet, Grammar, and Language.'

book a passing mention and, leaving readers to make the judgement, simply reproduced the translation of Portia's 'quality of mercy' speech.[90]

From this point on, Edmonds' book was little mentioned in either local or national press, surfacing only in articles about the author or when a new language or alphabet appeared on the scene.[91] However, Edmonds' obituary published in the *Birmingham Journal* drew attention to a noteworthy development. In Spain a 'Spanish sect of Language Universalists' had taken up Edmonds' work with enthusiasm and approached the French Emperor.[92] Napoleon III's previous support for Solresol, another 'a priori' language which was based on musical notation, suggests that this story is not implausible.[93] On this occasion, however, the Emperor was not impressed. The only way to establish a universal language was first to establish a universal empire, he suggested, and that was not possible just yet.[94]

Edmonds had produced his *Universal Language* at a point when attempts at creating an 'a priori' language began to falter**.** Increasingly, inventors turned to 'a posteriori' languages, which were based on existing natural ones, with simplified grammar and vocabulary. The first such language to gain widespread international attention, Volapük, launched in 1879, had a short life-span.[95] It was Esperanto, first proposed by Ludwik Zamenhof (1859-1917) in 1887, that became the most successful, driven partly by its relative ease of learning and partly by the message of international brotherhood and peace that accompanied it.[96]

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[90] *The Critic,* 15 March 1856, p. 50.
[91] *BJ*, 'Review: Papers of T.W. Hill', 3 November 1860 and 'Local Literature', 11 April 1863.
[92] *BJ*, 4 July 1868; Edwards, 'George Edmonds'.
[93] M. Pei, *One Language for the World* (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1968), p. 93.
[94] Edwards, 'George Edmonds'.
[95] Eco, *Search for the Perfect Language*, pp. 319-321.
[96] Eco, *Search for the Perfect Language*, pp. 324-330; Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages,* pp. 107-131.

Edmonds' endeavours were mentioned whenever Birmingham writers greeted a new language. When Volapük appeared, a reviewer looked back at Edmonds' work, praising his erudition but asking how it was that 'the unquestionably gifted man devoted years of his life to a hopelessly futile and terribly laborious task'. The writer suggested that there was a connection between this and the fact that Edmonds ended his days in an asylum.[97] Twenty years later, the writer of a local article on Esperanto also suggested a link between Edmonds' work and his later 'mental decay', concluding that the fact that his industry did not meet with a greater response 'must have beclouded the latter days of a strenuous life'.[98] Edmonds' Universal Language disappeared from view for most of the twentieth century, although it was mentioned when Professor Lancelot Hogben (1895–1975) of Birmingham University launched 'Interglossa', his own international language attempt.[99] In 1990, Chris Upton briefly revived the language in one of his regular *Birmingham Post* articles. In 'Forgotten City Father', Upton quoted several apposite phrases gleaned from the *Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language.*[100] Edmonds' work is also accorded recognition by Okrent, who includes it in her list of five hundred invented languages.[101]

Edmonds' Universal Language did not have the impact he had desired and expected. It was unwieldy and unworkable and based on an approach that was falling from fashion, even among enthusiasts for the project. The new 'a posteriori'

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[97] *Birmingham Mail*, 12 December 1887.
[98] BA&C, Birmingham Scrapbook Vol. 1, Part Two A: *Birmingham Daily Mail,* 30 August 1907, 'Esperanto Anticipated'.
[99] R. Bud, 'Hogben, Lancelot Thomas (1895–1975), biologist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-31244 (Accessed 23 July 2020); *Birmingham Mail,* 28 August 1943.
[100] *Birmingham Post,* 29 December 1990.
[101] Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages*, pp. 298-314, see also http://inthelandofinventedlanguages.com/index.php (Accessed 22 September 2019).

languages were easier to learn; they may have lacked the conceptual ambition of Wilkins' model, and been restricted in their reach but at least they gave learners the advantage of some familiarity with the sounds. Probably more significant was the fact that colonial expansion imposed European languages on a wider world, while improved communications extended the reach of various *lingua francas*, especially English itself. In addition, language teaching and learning came within reach of the new clerical class, as Edmonds' own great-nephew, Edward Edmonds, demonstrated. This son of Edward Paul Edmonds became the Birmingham and Midland Institute's 'most successful language student', achieving first-class certificates in German, French, Italian and Spanish.[102] He went on to pursue a career as a specialist foreign correspondence clerk.[103] Perhaps he was the real inheritor of Edmonds' enthusiasm for language.

It is impossible to know the extent to which the overall failure of his project affected Edmonds in his later years. Inclined to optimism and a survivor of many cycles of knocks and recovery, Edmonds might have taken the warm support of the Spanish enthusiasts as enough to cheer him, but the paucity of support from other quarters must surely have been a disappointment.[104] The long hours of dedicated work undoubtedly impacted on his health and family life in various ways. Patience, dealing with a wide variety of family responsibilities and with a husband frequently absent in court or at meetings, also had to contend with type-casting in her back yard.

[102] R. Waterhouse, *The Birmingham and Midland Institute 1854-1954* (Birmingham: BMI, 1954). See also Appendix B.
[103] *England 1881 Census*, Warwickshire, Edgbaston, District 11, Class: RG11; Piece: 2954; Folio: 56, GSU Roll: 1341707.
[104] The decline in Edmonds' mental health is discussed in Chapter Nine.

Edmonds' commitment to the project originated in his own interest in language and grammatical form and was boosted by local interest in the topic, shared by both religious and non-religious companions. While his language-related endeavours were further motivated by a desire to improve national and international communication, they were fired most of all by an obsessive dedication to the task. For Edmonds, it was the most important aspect of his life's work, but for both contemporaries and historians its significance appears much less than that of his achievements as a radical leader and civic figure. Nevertheless, his dedication deserves some recognition, as 'Este' noted in a newspaper article shortly after his death:

> It is easy to smile at the patient faith which elaborated such a scheme, at the calm consciousness that some day it would be universally adopted and admired, at the simplicity with which the founding of the language is described and at the large - perhaps misdirected - industry which generalised and grouped vocal and philological facts; but no one can refuse some sort of honour to one who not only dreamed of such a future but laboured to secure it.[105]

[105] BA&C, Birmingham Scrapbook Vol. 1, Part Two A, *Notes and Queries*, 11 July 1868.

Chapter Nine

CLERK OF THE PEACE AND HEAD OF THE FAMILY (1841-1868)

In 1841, with the confirmation of the Birmingham charter, Edmonds' role as the new Clerk of the Peace for Birmingham was assured. This gave him some financial security, but he pursued his ambition of becoming a fully qualified solicitor and continued to practise into his seventies. Eliezer Edwards' biography, and several obituaries, comment on Edmonds' activities as Clerk of the Peace, including his declining abilities, but do not comment on the continuing barriers he faced in the rest of his professional life.[1] The extent of these difficulties, and the ways in which he overcame them, are explored here, as are the possible reasons for his continuing anxiety about financial security and family responsibilities. The chapter also explores the degree to which Edmonds made an impact on Birmingham politics and society after 1841. Edwards does not mention any later political activity, while J. A. Langford writes that: 'From his appointment as Clerk of the Peace, he [Edmonds] only occasionally took part in public affairs, and his active political career may be said to have closed with that event.'[2] The obituary in the *Midland Counties Express*, on the other hand, suggests that Edmonds continued to pursue the cause of Reform: he was 'foremost in every subsequent agitation down to the most recent'.[3] The chapter considers if it is possible to reconcile these statements: whether Edmonds' activity was limited to appearing on platforms as a veteran Reformer, or if he actively

[1] *ABG,* 4 July 1868, *BJ,* 4 July 1868, *Midland Counties Express*, 4 July 1868, collected in BA&C, Birmingham Scrapbook Vol. 1, Part 2A; E. Edwards, 'George Edmonds', *Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men* (Birmingham, 1877).
[2] E. Edwards, 'George Edmonds'; J. Langford, *Modern Birmingham and its Institutions* (Birmingham: E.C. Osborne, 1877), p. 314.
[3] *Midland Counties Express*, 4 July 1868. The obituary goes on to say that Edmonds was 'intimate with Cobden, Bright, Villers and Rawson', in connection with the anti-Corn Law campaign.

participated in specific political campaigns. Edmonds final years were marked by illness and the chapter evaluates how his family, friends and colleagues reacted, and assesses what his experience reveals about the treatment of mental illness in this period.

In the absence of diaries or family letters, Edmonds' family connections and responsibilities are pieced together from newspaper reports and genealogical data. The *Records and Minutes* of the Birmingham Law Society again provide some insight into opposition Edmonds faced in pursuing his career.[4] The local press is a significant source for tracing Edmonds' continuing political engagement and the reports of public meetings give a flavour of disputes, especially around international matters. Records of the Birmingham and Abington Abbey Asylums have been utilised and these provide some insight into Edmonds' mental condition. However, these sources are limited to short official reports and even when these are taken together with other accounts, including Edwards biography and the obituaries, it is difficult to form conclusions about his condition.

The first two sections of the chapter consider Edmonds' later career and family responsibilities, the third examines his political and civic engagement while the last section is concerned with his declining years.

Edmonds as Clerk of the Peace and as a qualified solicitor

Edmonds' appointment as Clerk of the Peace brought him regular employment. The Clerk presided over the Quarter Sessions, a court which stood between the Assizes

[4] See Chapter Five for the Birmingham Law Society.

and the local Magistrates' Court.[5] Quarter Sessions also dealt with civic matters such as licensing of premises.[6] The *Minutes* of the Birmingham Quarter Sessions include the approval of the Duddeston Lunatic Asylum, appeals against orders under the Town Improvement Acts and numerous 'bastardy' cases.[7] The duties of the Clerk included giving notice of the Session, recording its proceedings, reading any acts referred to, calling the parties to plead, arraigning prisoners and sometimes drawing up bills of indictment, all of which indicate that a Clerk needed a good knowledge of the law. Appointments were for life, a rule which protected the officer from pressure, but was to cause some difficulty when Edmonds was ageing.[8] Clerks of the Peace were entitled to fees at rates agreed locally. These rates have not been preserved but some idea of the annual total can be gleaned from the figures that were mentioned when Edmonds' retirement was under discussion in the early 1860s.[9] The fees added up to more than £1,200, and even allowing for this being shared with his Deputy and clerks, suggests that Edmonds had an income from his Clerkship of £500 to £600 per annum, a figure putting him into the upper-middle class.[10]

The first meeting of the Birmingham Quarter Sessions took place on Friday 5 July 1839; Matthew Davenport Hill as Recorder and George Edmonds as Clerk of the Peace both made their declarations.[11] Edmonds nominated William Morgan as his

[5] F. Maitland and F. Montague, *A Sketch of English Legal History* (London: Putnams and Son, 1915), p. 174.
[6] BA&C AT 03/2005, *A Brief History of the Birmingham Court of Quarter Sessions*, filed with the QS catalogue.
[7] BA&C QS/B/1/1, *Birmingham Court of Quarter Sessions Minute Book*, 5 July 1839 – 30 December 1857.
[8] W. Dickinson, T. Talfourd, *A Practical Guide to the Quarter Sessions, and Other Sessions of the Peace: Adapted to the Use of Young Magistrates, and Professional Gentlemen, at the Commencement of Their Practice* (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1829), pp. 51-55.
[9] See below.
[10] £500 in 1860 would be equivalent to over £60,000 today.
[11] *ABG,* 8 July 1839.

Deputy and Morgan carried out the duties as Clerk at the first sessions.[12] It is not possible to tell how the work was shared out from then on because Edmonds as Clerk signed all the minutes.[13]

<u>Fig 9.1</u> George Edmonds

Birmingham Museums Trust. The portrait, by an unknown artist, appears to show Edmonds as Clerk of the Peace with his letter of appointment.

Although the rules ensured that a Clerk of the Peace could not practise as an attorney in any Session where he acted as Clerk, they did not prevent Edmonds

[12] Edwards, 'George Edmonds'. Edwards implies that this was because Edmonds was still recovering from his illness.
[13] BA&C QS/B/1/1 *Birmingham Court of Quarter Sessions Minute Book*, 5 July 1839 – 30 December 1857, p. 140. One exception was when Edmonds was appointed Clerk to the Visitors for Duddeston Asylum, when the record was signed by Matthew Davenport Hill as Recorder.

continuing to act as a representative in the Magistrates' Court. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s he continued his work as a local legal representative for those with little means. For example, he successfully defended confectioners who sold 'cherry bounce' without a licence, pointing out that the informers were unable to swear what proportions of brandy were used: the magistrates 'may as well convict Mrs Smith of selling plum pudding'.[14] He represented cabbies who were plying for hire outside their designated area in New Street.[15] He ensured that the overseers enforced an order against a recalcitrant father which prevented the family being taken into the workhouse.[16] He represented local workmen accused of carelessness when a roof fell and killed a passer-by; Edmonds' questioning revealed that the employer had failed to take adequate precautions.[17] He appeared for defendants in West Bromwich who were accused of rioting when they pulled down a wall erected across a public right of way.[18] He took on cases for respectable humanitarian societies: for instance, for the Animal Protection Society, and for the Anti-Truck Association.[19] However, he was not always on the side of the less powerful: on one occasion in 1842 he defended a 'nail-fogger' accused of purchasing stolen iron from a workman and defended another accused of paying in kind.[20] In these instances he acted like any professional lawyer taking on cases that would pay, which suggests he may have been under financial pressure at the time.[21] He practised at least until May 1860,

[14] *BJ*, 4 April 1840.
[15] *BJ*, 30 August 1851.
[16] *BJ*, 19 June 1841.
[17] *BJ,* 30 August 1851.
[18] *BJ,* 22 May 1852.
[19] *BJ,* 23 January 1847, 9 February 1850, 30 August 1851.
[20] TNA, MH/12/13905/212; *Worcester Herald*, 28 May 1842.
[21] He reverted to pursuing such cases against employers, in 1850 appearing in a truck case in Wolverhampton which drew national attention, *NS,* 6 April 1850.

when he appeared at the West Bromwich Magistrates' Court for defendants accused of attacking police after a late night at a beer house.[22]

Edmonds was finally admitted to the Roll of Attorneys in 1847, aged 59, and then only after further opposition from the BLS committee. In February 1847 the committee members noted that Edmonds was renewing his application for admission as an attorney and agreed they would object.[23] On 10 April they received a letter from Edmonds which explained that exclusion from the profession combined with 'claims on his personal resources' had led him to make another application. The letter included a tacit acknowledgement that his behaviour in the past had been less than proper, but suggested that circumstances had changed:

> (I hope) that the Committee of the Birmingham Law Society will judge of me, not by single acts arising under complicated circumstances of great difficulty for any inexperienced person to weigh with perfect wisdom or discretion but that they will rather judge of me by the whole course of my life and especially that part of it which has transpired since my first application for admission. [24]

This letter, uncharacteristically moderate and respectful in tone, did not persuade the committee who agreed to proceed with their objection.[25] However, Edmonds remained a consummate political organiser. A week later the BLS committee received a letter signed by 110 local attorneys:

> Understanding that Mr George Edmonds is about to apply to be admitted upon the roll of attorneys and being called upon by gentlemen of the

[22] *BJ,* 26 May 1860. He had just turned 72.
[23] BA&C MSS 2830, *Records and Minutes of the Birmingham Law Society,* 6 February 1847.
[24] *BLS Records and Minutes,* 10 April 1847.
[25] *BLS Records and Minutes*, 6 February 1847, 10 April 1847.

> profession to express our opinions and feelings thereupon, we hereby certify that from our knowledge of that gentleman we think him a very proper person to be admitted and that on various grounds, public and professional, it is very desirable.[26]

In the face of this appeal, a special members' meeting was called at which the committee agreed to withdraw their caveat 'in deference to the opinion of members'.[27] By July 1847 Edmonds was appearing in his professional robes in the County Court.[28] Aged 59, Edmonds had at last joined the ranks of Birmingham's professional classes.

Edmonds continued his busy working life in his sixties and seventies, acting as Clerk of the Peace and appearing in local courts. His brother-in-law Timothy Massey had begun work for him as a clerk in the late 1830s and continued working for him and supporting the family until Edmonds' death.[29] Alfred Walter acted as his managing clerk in the early 1850s and became a partner after his qualification in 1855.[30] Edmonds and Walter were based at 16 Whittall Street until the partnership was dissolved a year later.[31] John Edensor, George's grandson, qualified as a solicitor and appears in the directories at 16 Whittall Street in 1866; it can be assumed that he had taken over George's practice after George had finally retired as Clerk of the Peace.[32]

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[26] *BLS Records and Minutes*, 19 April 1847.
[27] *BLS Records and Minutes,* 22 May 1847. A face-saving resolution was passed which approved the committee's behaviour over the course of the affair.
[28] *BJ*, 10 July 1847.
[29] Timothy Massey, the son of a veteran radical, was husband to one of Patience's sisters. See Appendix C.
[30] *BJ,* 28 January 1854, 6 August 1855; *ABG,* 6 August 1855.
[31] *ABG,* 6 August 1855; *London Gazette,* October 28 1856, p. 3523. Alfred Walter opened offices in Waterloo Street but continued to live in Whittall St at Number 21.
[32] *Morris's Commercial Directory of Warwickshire with Birmingham* (Morris and Co.,1866).

Edmonds was able to overcome prejudice against him and was treated with respect by most Birmingham solicitors. He was able to pursue a relatively successful late career in the law although his combined duties must have been tiring, even with the support of William Morgan (as Deputy Clerk of the Peace) and Alfred Walter in his law business. The next section explores the reasons for his insistence on working into his seventies.

Edmonds' family responsibilities and financial difficulties

George and Patience faced emotional as well as material pressures in this period and had responsibilities for several relatives.[33] George's sister Sarah Bromfield Edmonds made a late marriage to plumber and glazier Frederick Price in 1836. The fact that George and Patience were witnesses suggests that Sarah lived with them between Reverend Edmonds' death in 1823 and her marriage.[34] In that year, 1836, the family sustained a heavy blow. George's brother Edward Amos Edmonds, who had been working as an attorney's clerk and journalist in London, killed himself, leaving five children.[35] George and Patience took in Mary Ann Edmonds; they may have already been responsible for the eldest child Edward Paul Edmonds.[36] These two young people would have been a lively addition to the household but they added to George's responsibilities. Nephew Edward Paul Edmonds entered the

[33] See Appendix A, Family Trees for the Edmonds and Hancock families.
[34] *Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937,* Birmingham St Martin, 28 Mar 1836, DRO 341, M115, Marriage of Frederick Price and Sarah Bromfield Edmonds.
[35] *Morning Post*, 18 April 1836. His wife had died in 1832. See Appendix B, 'Edward Amos Edmonds and Family'.
[36] See Appendix B and Chapter Five.

Birmingham police in 1840 but Mary Ann Edmonds stayed until her marriage in May 1847.[37]

George and Patience's own children had contrasting fates. His daughter Clarissa married solicitor Richard Edensor in 1837. Richard's father is described as a 'Gentleman'.[38] The couple moved to Ashbourne, Derbyshire in the 1840s where Richard continued to work as a solicitor; in 1851 the family included seven children, a housekeeper and several servants, suggesting they were comfortably off.[39] The marriages of Sarah Edmonds and then Clarissa may have lessened the financial burden on the Edmondses, but left Patience with less support in the household, especially for the care of Horace, George and Patience's seriously disabled son.[40] Horace died in October 1840, aged 25, the certificate stating 'decay of nature' as the cause of death.[41] A newspaper report at the time is revealing. Edmonds had been expected to chair a meeting of the New Publicans' Protection Society, but instead sent a letter of apology:

> … many of you will be persons having wives and children and who therefore will be able to enter into and comprehend my feelings, I have to say that I have lost an only and long-afflicted son, who has lived through twenty-five years of unmitigated privation and suffering, with nothing to console him but the sympathy of his parents. I say this will be quite

[37] See Appendix B. George's letter to the Birmingham Law Society, which referred to 'claims on my personal resources' was written a month before Mary Ann's marriage. Perhaps wedding expenses and some settlement were part of these.
[38] *Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937,* Birmingham, St. Martin, Warwickshire, England, Ref No. DRO 34, Archive Roll M115. Marriage of Richard Edensor and Clarissa Edmonds. Richard's address at the time of his marriage is given as Whittall Street, Birmingham, so he may have been working in Birmingham, but the family home was in Derbyshire.
[39] 185*1 England Census*, Sturston, Ashbourne, Derbyshire.
[40] See Chapter Five.
[41] Death Certificate for Horace Edmonds, d. 24 October 1840, Birmingham, St Mary, Deaths for 1840, No. 202.

> sufficient as my apology. Excuse my so far obtruding my afflictions on an otherwise convivial party; but I am sure that those most capable of enjoying the pleasures of life, and especially of social pleasures, generally possess that sensibility which often makes them more acutely suffer from the violations of domestic affections.[42]

This personal tragedy clearly affected Edmonds and Patience deeply; for George, the busy world of work and civic duties would provide some distraction, for Patience, it is probable that the church community and her niece Mary Ann Edmonds would be the main support.

Other family difficulties demanded attention. Once Edmonds had been appointed as Clerk of the Peace, support for the wider family would be expected. In the mid-1840s, George found himself involved in the affairs of his sister, Hannah Maria, and her husband James Silcock. The Silcocks had been appointed as Governor and Matron to the children's asylum in August 1847.[43] There is no record of George excusing himself from the vote to appoint them, although he was present. The following year, there were accusations of mismanagement and it quickly became clear that a contributory factor was the terminal illness of James Silcock.[44] Edmonds at this point declared an interest and acknowledged the relationship when he asked for a fair investigation. The affair ended with James's death and the Guardians decided not to keep Hannah on.[45] She moved in with George and Patience, appearing in the 1851 census at the Whittall Street house.[46] There were responsibilities too for Patience's side of the family: her brother Thomas Gregory

[42] *BJ*, 31 October 1840.
[43] *BJ,* 28 August 1847.
[44] *BJ*, 24 June 1848.
[45] *BJ*, 23 September 1848.
[46] *1851 England Census*, Birmingham St Mary.

Hancock died in 1840, leaving a wife and several dependent children. Elder son Charles Gregory Hancock was able to become a solicitor's clerk, suggesting that George's support had been at work.[47]

In his 1847 letter to the BLS, Edmonds had referred to having suffered a financial loss. He had stood as bondsman to a collector of taxes, Eggington, who defaulted. Edmonds became liable for nearly £700. At a Guardians' meeting in August 1847 he lamented the fact that a collector already carrying a debt had been allowed to continue operating.[48] It is not clear whether a move from Number 15 to Number 16 Whittall Street about the same time and the letting out of Number 15, was motivated by the need to occupy a better house, or to vacate a roomier one and benefit from the rent received.[49] Number 16 Whittall Street was an impressive-looking house (Figure 9.2). However, it was not a gentleman's residence on the model of those in the new Calthorpe Estate. The Whittall Street gun-quarter area was, by the 1850s, full of courts and manufacturing. The house would have contained George's offices as well as living quarters, not to speak of a type-casting machine in the back yard. An explosion at the Whittall Street premises of Pursall and Phillips' percussion cap manufactory in September 1859 demonstrated just how mixed the area was.[50] Throughout this later period, the Edmondses sustained the life of a busy middle-

[47] England & Wales, Free BMD Birth Index, 1837-1915, George Edmonds Cornewall Gregory Hancock, 1854, Q1 Birmingham Vol. 6d, p. 170; *1851 England Census*, Birmingham St George.
[48] *ABG,* 23 August 1847.
[49] *ABG*, 4 December 1848.
[50] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 28 September 1859; E. Palmer, 'An Accident Waiting to Happen? The Whittall Street explosion of 1859', Talk given for the Friends of Birmingham Archives and Heritage, 19 May 2018. The premises were destroyed, taking 19 lives. Edmonds' previous partner, Alfred Walter, became something of a hero and George's nephew Inspector Edmonds was another promptly on the scene. There is no record of damage to George's house at Number 16.

class Victorian household with some members of the extended family living with them and one or two live-in servants.[51]

Figure 9.2 16 Whittall Street Birmingham

Phyllis Nicklin (The Gun Quarter, 1963) (University of Birmingham)

In 1860, George's nephew, Superintendent of Police Edward Paul Edmonds, was forced out of office after accusations of misappropriation of funds and, in a terrible repetition of his father's fate, committed suicide.[52] Although Edward Paul Edmonds' wife, Elizabeth, was subsequently able to maintain an ironmonger's shop in Aston, it is likely that George provided support. He could at least have taken pride in the achievements of his great-nephews, George and Edward, who both did well in their

[51] 1841 one servant: Hannah Bailey, *1841 England census*, Birmingham St Mary; 1851, two servants, Eliza Packwood and Selina Hodgkins, *1851 England census*, Birmingham St Mary; 1861 one servant, Harriet Williams, *1861 England Census,* Birmingham St Mary.
[52] *England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837-1915*, Aston, Warwickshire, Vol. 6d, p. 113, death of Edward Paul Edmonds. See Appendix, Edmond Amos Edmonds and family.

studies at the Birmingham Midland Institute in the 1860s.[53] His own grandson also experienced success. John Edensor was a member of the Birmingham Law Students' Society when he passed his law exams in 1862, and it can be assumed he had moved from Derbyshire to lodge with George. He took a full part in the social and sporting activities appropriate for a young professional man.[54]

George was able to carry out his responsibilities to his family but was constantly aware of the burden of doing so. The triumphs and tribulations of the Edmonds family reflect both the opportunities and challenges facing middle-class families in early-to-mid-Victorian England. Individuals such as George's nephew, Inspector Edmonds, could rise to positions of responsibility, but any suggestion of impropriety could mean the immediate threat of penury. A wife such as Hannah Maria Edmonds could lose her own employment on her husband's death. Debt could arrive suddenly, necessitating a prolonged working life. Opportunity went alongside precariousness.

Edmonds' later political and civic activity

Edmonds continued to participate in political reform initiatives, although his days of leadership were over. His political activities reflect a move from popular radicalism to mid-Victorian liberalism, although with some hints of his old stance. Although he had declared to the Town Council that, as Clerk of the Peace, he would not become involved directly in political activities, he did continue to be involved in various radical causes.[55] He aligned himself with Joseph Sturge on a number of occasions, nominating Sturge for the vacant parliamentary seat after Attwood's retirement in late

[53] See Appendix, Edmond Amos Edmonds and family.
[54] *ABG,* 1 February 1862,12 August 1863; *BJ,* 24 December 1864, 4 November 1865. He played cricket, acted as Steward at the Queens Hospital Ball and excelled at a sports day organised by the Birmingham Rifle Volunteers.
[55] See Chapter Seven.

1839.[56] With other erstwhile BPU leaders he came under attack from local Chartists especially when they were denied the use of the Town Hall.[57] He did attend a soirée held by the 'moral force' Complete Suffrage Union, led by Sturge and Arthur O'Neill.[58] He became a founder member of the new Reform League of 1848, a body which defeated a Chartist amendment to adopt the whole Charter on 31 May 1848.[59] This suggests that Edmonds had adopted a gradualist position on the vote, something confirmed when in 1852, he urged support for Lord John Russell's Reform Bill, although it fell short of the aims of reformers.[60]

Edmonds' radicalism was perhaps best exemplified in his continuing interest in international affairs: supporting the Hungarian campaign for independence, and contributing to the Garibaldi Fund in May 1860.[61] This was in line with the mainstream self-confident Birmingham radical opinion identified by David Butcher, that supported European national self-determination, was led by the middle class, and emphasised class unity.[62] However, Edmonds was prepared to join in less popular causes and his activities reveal the presence of a more thorough-going internationalism. He opposed the 'Kaffir Wars', seconding a resolution which called for an end to land seizures and colonial expansion.[63] In 1856, with Joseph Sturge, he was part of a peace delegation to Palmerston calling for an arbitration clause to be

[56] *ABG*, 27 January 1840.
[57] *NS*, 1 May 1841.
[58] *BJ*, 27 May 1843. For Joseph Sturge and Arthur O'Neill, see Appendix C.
[59] *ABG*, 5 June 1848; A. Briggs, 'Political and Administrative History: Political History from 1832', in W B. Stephens (ed), *A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 7, the City of Birmingham* (London, 1964), pp. 298-317, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol7/pp298-317, para 19 [accessed 7 November 2020].
[60] *BJ,* 21 December 1852.
[61] *BJ*, 4 August 1849; 18 May 1860.
[62] D. Butcher, 'Foreign Politics and Middle-Class Radicals in Birmingham 1848-1858', *Midland History* Vol. 20, 1995, pp. 119-136.
[63] *ABG*, 19 January 1852. This was a return to the policy previously adopted by Lord Glenelg.

included in the Treaty of Paris at the end of the Crimean War.[64] At a time when post-Mutiny policy towards India was sharply contested, he suggested that John Bright could help to 'throw oil upon the perturbed waters and help prevent occurrences that might sever us from that magnificent territory'.[65] In 1860 he joined Arthur O'Neill and William Morgan in protesting against further war with China.[66] At the same time he remained a supporter of missionary work. For radical Christians, the mission could go alongside peaceful colonial relations, its contradictions not fully explored.[67] Edmonds was part of a wing of Birmingham liberalism that was critical of imperialist expansion and war but fell short of outright opposition to colonialism.

Edmonds continued his commitment to the abolitionist cause and was present at the unveiling of the monument to Joseph Sturge on 7 June 1862.[68] He was part of the delegation in early 1863, when Borough Representatives visited US ambassador Charles Adams in London to present an Address to President Lincoln, assuring him of support from Birmingham citizens for the North in the Civil War.[69] He maintained his interest in the Irish question; one obituary refers to Edmonds being 'a friend of Daniel O'Connell since the time of Catholic Emancipation', something confirmed by his chairing a Town Hall meeting when O'Connell visited Birmingham in 1844 in

[64] *BJ*, 19 March 1856; A. Tyrrell, 'Sturge, Joseph (1793–1859), philanthropist,' *ODNB*, 2004. The delegation was from the Peace Congress, an initiative organised by Sturge.
[65] *BJ,* 5 August 1857.
[66] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 29 February 1860; *BJ,* 3 March 1860.
[67] He was a regular attender at the annual meeting of the Baptist Missionary Society, for example; *ABG,* 4 August 1851.
[68] *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 5 June 1862; *Leamington Spa Courier* 7 June 1862. Andy Green has pointed out that George Dawson's speech on this occasion revealed a shift towards ideas of racial superiority. We cannot fully know Edmonds' attitudes towards Dawson's views. We can, however, be sure that Edmonds, who had praised the achievements of the Haitian black-led government, would not have talked as Dawson did, of Sturge's fondness for 'negroes and all sorts of low and unlovely people'. A. Green, '"The Anarchy of Empire": Reimagining Birmingham's Civic Gospel', *Midland History*, Vol. 36, No. 2, Autumn 2011, pp. 163-179.
[69] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 22 March 1863. The Emancipation Proclamation of 1 January 1863 ensured that abolitionist sentiment rallied to the side of the Union.

pursuit of the Repeal Act.[70] He spoke at the November 1846 'Opening of the Ports' Town Hall meeting, during the famine, calling on the Whig government to 'get rid of their habit of being as bold as lions when out of office and as tame as mice when in it'.[71] He intervened in matters of religious freedom for Catholics, siding with George Dawson over the question of the Maynooth Grant, both of them speaking against any expression of anti-Catholic feeling or petitioning, despite believing that Church and State should be separate.[72] The proposal to establish a Catholic hierarchy in Britain posed even more difficulties for non-conformists. In advance of a Town Hall meeting in December 1850, called to discuss the question, Edmonds and Thomas Weston sent out a circular letter to 'those favourable to the ENTIRE FREEDOM OF RELIGIOUS OPINION' asking them to attend a pre-meeting. This surviving example of Edmonds' political organising shows him consulting and collecting allies together. When John Angel James and Richard Spooner proposed a town statement against the establishment of a Catholic hierarchy in Britain, Dawson, Sturge and Edmonds made a counter-proposal supporting religious freedom and non-interference from the state. The six-hour debate ended with a stalemate.[73]

Edmonds proposed John Bright as a parliamentary candidate at a meeting of 'Liberals', in August 1857.[74] Bright's nomination was by no means assured: his opposition to British imperial policies made him unpopular in some radical and liberal

[70] BA&C, Birmingham Scrapbook, Vol. One, Part 2A, *Midlands Counties Express,* 4 July 1868; *ABG*, 11 March 1844. O'Connell's aim was to repeal the Union and institute a separate parliament in Dublin.
[71] *ABG*, 9 November 1846. This meeting brought together ACLL supporters like himself and the old currency reform radicals like G.F. Muntz.
[72] *BJ,* 10 May 1845. Peel proposed raising the government grant paid to Maynooth College, a Catholic seminary in Ireland.
[73] MS 670/ 24, Miscellaneous collection of manuscript and printed items, many relating to the Edmonds family of Birmingham, Letter from Thomas Weston and G. Edmonds; *BJ*, 16 December 1850; R. Dent, *Old and New Birmingham,* Vol. 3 (Wakefield: E.P. Publishing, 1973 [1878-80]), pp. 534-537. Both the amendment and original proposition were lost.
[74] *BJ,* 8 August 1857.

quarters.[75] For Edmonds, however, Bright's international policies were a positive feature and, far from glossing over his more controversial views, he drew attention to them, drawing hisses and groans as well as applause. Edmonds employed his usual irony and self-mockery to win over the crowd: '…he had now no ambition at all to distinguish himself at public meetings, his habits had become perfectly retired and he preferred enjoying himself at his own fireside'. The laughter that followed suggests he was still regarded as an active participant in politics, as well as a past player in the reform movement.[76] Edmonds continued to appear on platforms in the 1860s, for example, when MPs Scholefield and Bright addressed their constituents in January 1860 and 1861.[77] He campaigned for the ballot, even inventing a ballot box which was exhibited in March 1861.[78]

He made his last speech on a public platform in 1866 at the Reform Meeting in the Town Hall on 27 August 1866, which Langford refers to as his valedictory address and when the affection towards him was clearly demonstrated.[79] The Mayor had just begun his introductory remarks when Edmonds appeared:

> Immediately that his venerable form and silver hair and beard were seen by the spectators in the body of the hall, there was sent up such a shout of applause as made it impossible for the Mayor to continue his remarks… there was one universal call for 'Three cheers for George Edmonds'. The cheers were given, and whilst this display of admiration for a veteran

[75] Ward, *City-State and Nation,* pp. 54-55; P. Bounous, 'Bright for Birmingham? A Reassessment of the Popularity of John Bright as M.P. for Birmingham, 1857-1889' (Unpub. MA Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2011), pp. 10-11.
[76] *BJ,* 8 August 1857. He also seconded Bright's nomination in 1859; *BJ,* 30 April 1859.
[77] *BJ,* 7 January 1860, *ABG*, 2 February 1861.
[78] *ABG,* 23 March 1861.
[79] J. Langford, *Modern Birmingham and its Institutions: a Chronicle of Local Events from 1841-71,* Vol. 2 (Birmingham: E.C. Osborne, 1877), p. 315.

Reformer was taking place, gentlemen on the crowded platform were vying with each other in a desire to give up their chairs for Mr. Edmonds's use.[80]

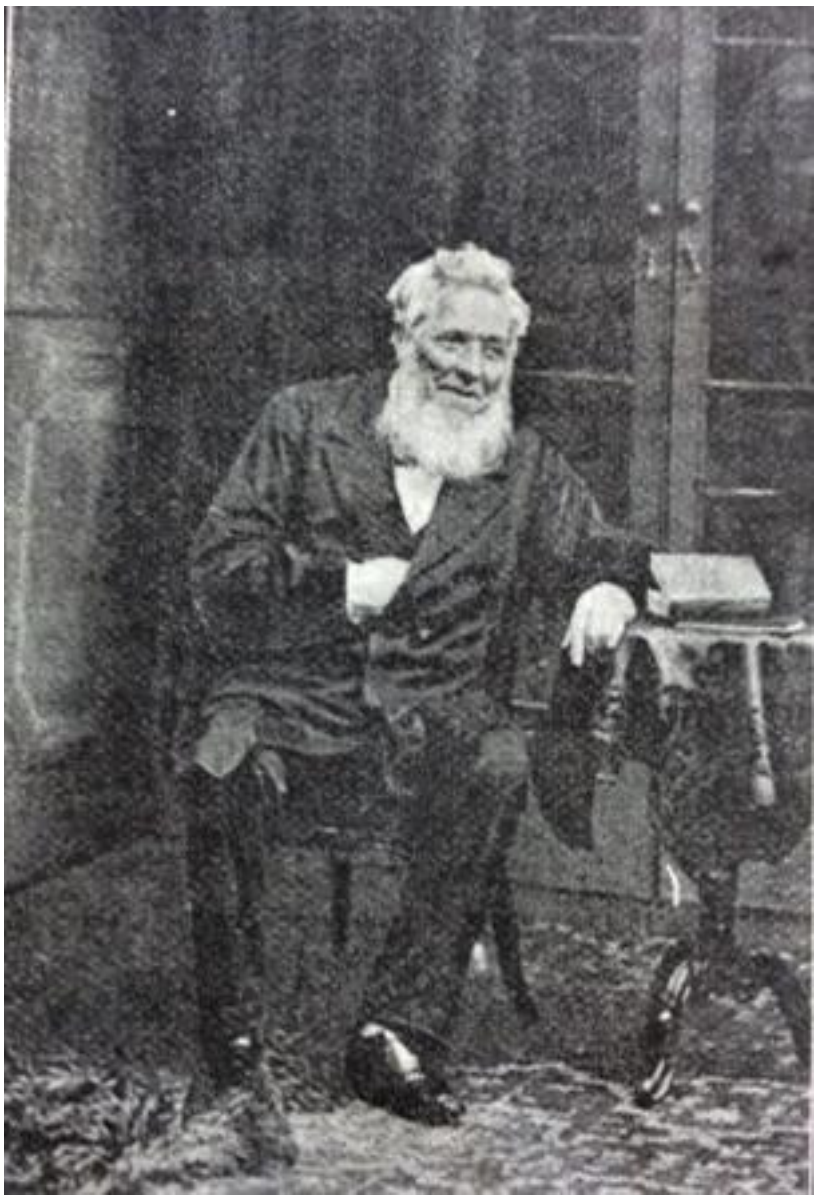

Figure 9.3 '**George Edmonds from a photograph by Whitlock'**

Source: BA&C Portraits of George Edmonds

Edmonds, however, was not just there to make a sentimental speech about the past. He suggested that while Birmingham's Liberals congratulated themselves and the

[80] *Birmingham Daily Post,* 28 August 1866

town on the past achievements of the BPU, they should not forget the movement's more radical and artisan past nor avoid commitment to extending the franchise now:

> Any association which refused to support the claims of the people would deserve the contempt instead of meeting the approval of the people....He had travelled fifty miles for the purpose of doing justice to a class of men who were unfortunately forgotten in the story of Birmingham which had been published.[81]

This attempt to convince the town's middle-class Liberals that they should embrace more radical political reform was Edmonds' last political act.[82]

Edmonds continued his involvement in broader civic life in the 1840s and 1850s. His position as Clerk of the Peace does not appear to have prevented him taking a leading role in opposing the Street Commissioners' own proposal to increase their powers and, at a Town's Meeting of 28 May 1845, he proposed a resolution for amalgamation of the two bodies.[83] He continued to act as a Guardian. In this arena, some of the politics and attitudes he espoused in his earlier campaigning came under pressure. For instance, he was co-opted as a Guardian in October of that year, a beneficiary of the system he had previously criticised.[84] When in 1848 an inspection revealed serious overcrowding and poor conditions in the asylum, Edmonds, the one-time scourge of mismanagement, expressed his resentment at

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[81] *Birmingham Daily Gazette,* 28 August 1866. A previous newspaper article had not mentioned the Hampden Club in an account of the movement for political reform. Edmonds' remembrance is useful because he also stated that the Birmingham Hampden Club was formed in 1815 and had a card membership.

[82] His reference to travelling fifty miles suggests that he was then staying with his daughter Clarissa in Ashbourne, Derbyshire.

[83] J.T. Bunce, *History of the Corporation of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Birmingham Corporation, 1878), pp. 297-299. Eventually the matter was resolved when the duties of the Commissioners were transferred by an Improvement Act in 1851.

[84] BA&C, GP/B/2/1/4 *Birmingham Union Board of Guardians Minutes* 1838-45, Meeting, 16 October 1843. This process was repeated in 1846.

this criticism with the unworthy remark that 'there seemed to be a conspiracy among surgeons, commissioners, and some other parties, to take care of paupers and nobody else [laughter]'.[85] His more serious point was to object to the wholesale dismissal of all the asylum staff, rather than identifying those particularly responsible. However, as members of his family were involved, he was open to the charge of favouritism.[86]

Edmonds performed a *volte-face* over the question of the new Workhouse, at first opposing the idea of a new building on Birmingham Heath which would move the poor out of town. The Scriptures, he reminded his fellow Guardians, said that the poor are always with us: 'Providence never designed that all this mass of wretchedness and misery should be kept out of the sight of those whose duty it was to relieve it.'[87] The Poor Law Commissioners, however, would not countenance the continued use of the Lichfield Street site which had become crowded and dirty.[88] In 1848 Edmonds changed his opinion, facing a Parish Meeting to propose the adoption of the Birmingham Heath site.[89] Here he came up against his old adversary, Joseph Allday, who opposed the move partly on the grounds of cost and partly because the Guardians were sending people to the workhouse who should be offered outdoor relief.[90] Allday's proposal may have been parsimonious but it might have been more compassionate, had his proposal for more outdoor relief been carried out. Edmonds' alternative perhaps provided more acceptable

[85] *BJ,* 6 May 1848.
[86] *ABG*, 3 July 1848. See above, Edmonds and the Silcocks.
[87] *ABG*, 14 September 1846; *BJ,* 12 September 1846.
[88] Dent, *Making of Birmingham*, p. 432.
[89] *ABG*, 17 July 1848.
[90] *ABG*, 14 August 1848; *BJ,* 19 August 1848. Allday lost in the poll that followed, the proposal to build on the Heath being carried by 698 votes to 191.

accommodation but, as he had previously recognised, it excluded the poor from town.

Edmonds could be said to be part of the Liberal establishment in the town in these later years. His defensiveness over conditions in the asylum went against the grain of his earlier campaigning stance, opening him to charges of hypocrisy although his qualities of public service were shown in his long tenure as a Guardian. He was no longer a leader of political opinion or organisations, but he still took a role in promoting radical and liberal causes.

Edmonds' last years, 1860-68

Edmonds experienced family difficulties, problems over his retirement, and mental illness in his last years and this section examines how he, his colleagues and family dealt with these challenges. 1860 dealt a double blow: first, the family was affected by the dismissal and then suicide of his nephew, Superintendent of Police Edward Paul Edmonds.[91] Then, in September 1860, Patience Edmonds, George's wife of 48 years, died. It is not possible to know whether this was a sudden stroke or came at the end of a long illness – the death certificate refers to 'sanguineous apoplexy'.[92] She was buried in Key Hill cemetery next to their son Horace.[93]

In 1860, at the age of seventy-two, George Edmonds had been Clerk of the Peace for the Borough of Birmingham for over thirty years. His absent-mindedness in office caused considerable merriment in court, according to Eliezer Edwards.[94] After a

[91] See above and Appendix B 'The Family of Edward Amos Edmonds.'
[92] Patience was 78 when she died; Death Certificate for Patience Edmonds, d. 9 September 1860, Birmingham, St Mary, Deaths for 1860, No. 57.
[93] *BJ,* 15 September 1860; *Key Hill Cemetery Burial Records*: 1303 Horace Edmonds, 15339 Patience Edmonds.
[94] Edwards, 'George Edmonds'.

change in the court lay-out, Edmonds mistook the defendant for the foreman of the jury. He increasingly muddled his paperwork, on one occasion addressing a female defendant as John Smith. The Recorder, his friend Matthew Davenport Hill, appears to have tolerated and even enjoyed such errors but eventually Edmonds' mistakes became too great.[95] The first serious attempt by the Town Council to remove him was made in 1863.[96]

The editorial comments in *Aris's Gazette* were cautious: 'For some time past the increasing age and infirmity of Mr. George Edmonds have prevented him from discharging the duties of the Clerk of the Peace with the efficiency and accuracy which have marked his long and honourable career in important public office.' However, Mr Edmonds was 'clinging tenaciously' to his post. It was suggested that a way should be found for Edmonds to resign and accept a pension.[97] A fortnight later, the same newspaper raised the 'graver' question of the payment of fees. The Treasury had, since 1857, disallowed claims amounting to £1,200 made by the Clerk of the Peace, a sum which then became a drain on the Borough purse. The newspaper suggested that this might be because of errors or that the 'Clerk of the Peace (to put it in the mildest form) has construed the table of fees more liberally than the Treasury officers could be induced to sanction'.[98]

However carefully this was phrased, this was potentially a serious charge. The *Birmingham Daily Gazette* was less circumspect. It argued that the fees were higher than those sanctioned by higher legal authorities in London, and suggested that both

[95] BA&C, Birmingham Scrapbook Vol. 1, Part 2A; Edwards, 'George Edmonds'.
[96] *ABG*, 7 February 1863 and 21 February 1863.
[97] *ABG,* 7 February 1863. M. D. Hill had thought Edmonds was already retiring in February 1861, referring to his having 'gone for ever' in a letter to his sister Rosamond (R.D. and F.D Hill, *The Recorder of Birmingham*, p. 410).
[98] *ABG*, 21 February 1863.

problems would be solved by Edmonds' retirement but 'Mr Edmonds… sticks to his fees as firmly as he sticks to his office'.[99] After the Watch Committee had made a formal report, Edmonds responded energetically, writing a long letter to the *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, stating that the table of fees had been agreed some twenty years before and compared favourably with those charged in many other boroughs. He had clearly conducted extensive research, arguing that their Lordships had 'disallowed' some fees from nearly every other Clerk of the Peace he had consulted.[100] The affair of Edmonds' retirement rumbled on for the next 18 months. The Council's first plan to pension him off failed, but by October 1864 Edmonds had agreed to appoint as his Deputy a person chosen by the Council. He would retain £600 of his salary – as an informal pension – while the Deputy would receive £250 and other fees.[101] Edmonds therefore 'retired' at the end of 1864.[102] In March 1865 the Clerk of the Peace offices were moved from Whittall Street to Moor Street.[103] With the question finally settled, Matthew Davenport Hill was able to make a heartfelt tribute to Edmonds when he himself retired because of ill-health in January 1866.[104]

How should Edmonds' behaviour over these few years be characterised? Eccentricity and absent-mindedness in Court seem to have tipped into irascibility and incompetence, and a reasonable desire for a comfortable retirement had developed into a jealous defence of his income and fees. Edmonds had always been ambitious, eager to achieve professional status and accrue legal fees, but at the same time he

[99] *BDG*, 23 March 1863.
[100] 'Letter from the Clerk of the Peace to the Editor of the *Daily Gazette'*, 24 March 1863, BA&C, *Birmingham Scrapbook 1, Part 2A.*
[101] *BJ,* 31 October 1863; *Birmingham Daily Post,* 12 October 1864; *BDG,* 15 October 1864. This arrangement went ahead although Edmonds' preferred candidate for Deputy, his existing Deputy, Mr Maher, was not chosen; *Birmingham Daily Post,* 10 November 1864.
[102] His last signature was on the minutes of 24 October 1864, BA&C QS/B/1/2, *Birmingham Court of the Quarter Sessions Minute Book 2, 29 March 1858-23 October 1866*, 24 October 1864.
[103] *BDG,* 6 March 1865.
[104] *BDG,* 9 January 1866.

had been a defender of the poor and a proud servant of the Borough. This later apparently grasping approach does not sit comfortably with his earlier views. On the other hand, his inherited family responsibilities may have compounded his desire for a continuing income. Edmonds' research into the emoluments received by other Clerks of the Peace suggests that his intellect remained robust, even if marred by obsession. He was able to participate in some significant civic duties, for example, as a Guardian at least until 1862, and in some political events, as detailed above. His intervention at the Town Hall meeting of 28 August 1866 showed a rational mind and a continued determination to pursue wider political reform.[105] If his behaviour in some instances showed signs of paranoia or depression, this illness, if it can be characterised as such, appears to be episodic.

Edmonds' reference in his speech on 28 August 1866 to travelling fifty miles suggests that he was then staying with his daughter Clarissa in Ashbourne, Derbyshire. Clarissa's husband Richard Edensor had died the month before.[106] However, George did not settle into a comfortable retirement there. The most curious aspect of his last years was his late second marriage in 1867 to Mary Fairfax, of Leamington, whom Eliezer Edwards described as being from 'a truly noble family'. Edwards states that the couple's dispositions were so dissimilar that they separated by mutual consent within three weeks, and he suggests that George's mind was already giving way.[107] However, the union was not as implausible as it might appear. The Fairfaxes were indeed a leading Barford family, and Mary Fairfax was a woman of means, but there were already connections between the Edmonds and Fairfax

[105] *BDG,* 28 August 1866.
[106] *Derbyshire Select Parish Registers,* Burial Date 24 July 1866, Alsop-en-le-Dale, Derbyshire; Burial of Richard Edensor.
[107] Edwards, 'George Edmonds'.

families.[108] When George's uncle, the successful gun-engraver Amos Edmonds, made his own second marriage to Esther Orton in 1824, Mary Fairfax had been one of the witnesses.[109] After Amos's death in Barford in 1834, Esther lived with Mary Fairfax.[110] A year after Patience's death, Mary Fairfax was a visitor in George's Whittall Street house at the time of the 1861 census.[111] Presumably either the age or status of the two, or the presence of a female servant, rendered this visit respectable.[112] This background translates what at first sight appears to be a highly unsuitable match between two ill-assorted individuals into a late marriage of comfort and convenience.[113] However, whatever the reasons for the marriage, it does seem to have broken down. When George made his will three weeks later in Ashbourne on 16 August 1867, he described his residence as 'sometimes with my daughter Clarissa at Shaw House Ashbourne and sometimes at Leamington'. Clarissa was made sole beneficiary and executrix.[114] Edmonds left 'under £800' which implies a sum within the probate band £600-800. He was comfortably off by the time of his death.

In February 1868 Edmonds' mental health broke down irreparably. On Saturday 15 February he visited Mr Glossop, the Superintendent of Police in Birmingham,

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[108] John Fairfax, Barford Media Mogul,<<http://www.barfordheritage.org.uk/content/people/john-fairfax-2>>; *1851 England Census*, Warwickshire, Barford. Mary Fairfax, spinster, is described as a 'proprietor of houses'.
[109] *Warwickshire, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1910*, Warwickshire County Record Office; Warwick, England; Warwickshire Anglican Registers; Roll: Engl/2/1099; DR 207, Marriage of Amos Edmonds and Esther Orton.
[110] *1841 England Census,* Warwickshire, Barford.
[111] *1861 England Census*, Birmingham, St Mary.
[112] Mary's age is given in the census as 66 but she was in fact 76; George was 73.
[113] The marriage may have been contemplated for several years: one perplexing record suggests that George was baptised into the Church of England in late 1863. There is no evidence that he changed his religious allegiance so this might have been in preparation for marriage to Miss Fairfax. *England, Births and Christenings, 1538-1975,* St Peter's, Birmingham, 27 November 1863, Baptism of George Edmonds (b. 10 March 1788, father Edward Edmonds, Mother Sarah Edmonds).
[114] Will of George Edmonds, 16 August 1867, England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966.

convinced that he was being followed by someone who intended to rob him. After Glossop was unable to allay his fears, Edmonds went to the police court and demanded that Mr Kynnersley, the Stipendiary Magistrate, see him immediately as he was in need of protection: 'I cannot leave this place; I am in great danger; I am dogged about by a parcel of scoundrels both here and in Leamington, and they have combined together in an attempt to rob me'. He was led away by two officers, still shouting. The *Birmingham Daily Gazette* added that, although it had not been made public previously, 'the failure of this gentleman's intellect has been for some time past a source of much anxiety to his friends'.[115]

The records of the Birmingham Asylum at Winson Green suggest that he was admitted that very same day, on 15 February 1868, with the consent of John Edensor, his grandson.[116] The form of mental disorder recorded was 'Mania' and the duration of existing attacks as 'months', with physicians Townshend and Hunt signing the certificate. His asthmatic condition was also noted.[117] The suggestion that the condition had lasted 'months' confirms the newspaper suggestions that Edmonds' mental health had been deteriorating in a marked manner over the medium term. He was a patient in Winson Green for less than a month: on 11 March 1868 he was discharged and removed to Abington Abbey Retreat in Northampton, a private asylum.[118] This had a reputation as a modern and humane institution, confirmed by the report in the *Birmingham Journal* which referred to it as a well-

[115] *BDG*, 17 February 1868; *Coventry Herald*, 21 February 1868. The *Coventry Herald* report refers to Edmonds 'lately residing in Leamington'.
[116] John Edensor, solicitor in Whittall Street, would have been the closest relative to hand, *Morris's Commercial Directory of Warwickshire with Birmingham, 1866*. p. 33.
[117] BA&C, MSS 344 All Saints Mental Hospital 1850 -1973**,** 5/1 *Register of Admissions for Private Patients, Birmingham Asylum,* Patient No. 538. Edmonds' profession is given as Solicitor and his abode as Leamington.
[118] MSS 344 5/1, *Register of Admissions*, Date of Discharge, 11 March 1868. No case notes have been preserved.

regarded asylum with a well-known proprietor where Edmonds would have 'every attention and comfort his case requires'.[119] It is most likely that the Edmonds family, and specifically his daughter Clarissa, his executrix, and sole beneficiary in his will, made the decisions regarding the asylum.

Abington Abbey Retreat had been founded in 1845 by Dr Thomas O. Prichard, a pioneer who believed in 'moral treatment', an approach which advocated the use of recreation and watchful attendants rather than any mechanical restraint.[120] Fees were set at 'upward of a guinea a week,' meaning that the clientele would have been middle-class families. After Prichard's death in 1848, his role was taken over by a cousin, another pioneering Thomas Prichard who was in post when Edmonds was admitted.[121] The local Visitors' Reports from 1868 give an impression of an orderly, comfortable and well-regulated institution. On 23 March the Visitors reported that 18 Ladies, 15 Gentlemen and one boarder were resident in the House, which was clean and well-aired. All the patients, except one gentleman, were tranquil.[122] That exception might have been the most recently admitted patient, George Edmonds, received on 11 March. According to the Private Patient Admission Statement completed by Thomas Prichard:

> He is at times excited and then despondent. He is under the impression that persons wish to deprive him of his house and property. (He) wished to make

[119] *BJ,* 7 March 1868.
[120] W. Parry-Jones, *The Trade in Lunacy: A Study of Private Madhouses in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 78-9; A. Foss, K. Lloyd, K. Trick, *St. Andrew's Hospital, Northampton: The First 150 Years (1838-1988)* (Cambridge: Granta Editions, 1989), pp. 26-32.
[121] Foss, Lloyd and Trick, *St. Andrew's Hospital, Northampton*, p. 61. Parry-Jones suggests that it was Prichard's son that took over, but the dates make this impossible.
[122] Northamptonshire Records Office, LG1/CC/424, *Abington Abbey Visitors' Book*, 1868.

arrangements with me to enable him to remain here for seven years. His memory seems to be impaired and his mind weakened.

Prichard also noted that he 'labours under chronic asthma and has disturbed nights'.[123]

The next local Visitors' Report of 15 June states that all the patients were tranquil.[124] However, within a fortnight of their report, Edmonds had died on 1 July 1868. There is a mystery attached to his death. *Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham*, published in 1885, suggests that Edmonds' death was 'hastened by his own hand' but no other source corroborates this.[125] It is possible that the obituaries refrained from mentioning a suicide, out of respect, although they did refer to Edmonds' decline and mental incapacity.[126] However, the Abington death record, signed and dated 1 July 1868 by Thomas Prichard, stated that 'the apparent cause of death was intestinal obstruction and enteritis'.[127] Edmonds' death certificate gave the same causes and was signed by A.J. Freeman MD, who was present at the death.[128] Although neither of these records entirely rules out self-harm, there was no mention of a suicide in the official reports for the relevant period and suicide in asylums was carefully monitored at the time.[129] The local Visitors, who reported on 22 September 1868, recorded one

[123] Northamptonshire Records Office, LG1/CC/491/1-20, Abington Abbey Retreat. *Private Patient Admission Statement*: George Edmonds. The reference to Edmonds' asthma by both the Winson Green and Abington doctors may add to an understanding of his earlier illnesses, including the 'apoplexy' referred to in 1820, the illness which laid him low in March 1831 and his near-death in 1839.
[124] *Abington Abbey Visitors' Book*, 1868.
[125] T. Harman and W. Showell, *Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Cornish Bros, 1885), p. 329.
[126] *BJ*, 4 July 1868; *BDG*, 4 July 1868.
[127] Northamptonshire Records Office, LG1/CC/486/1-8, *Abington Abbey Asylum July-August 1868, Notice of the death of a patient*: George Edmonds, died 1 July 1868.
[128] Northampton Union, St Giles, 1868, GRO 1868. Qtr S. Vol 03B, P 3. *Death Certificate of George Whitfield Edmonds*. Edmonds' age is given as 78 but he had in fact reached 80. I can find no evidence of an inquest.
[129] A. Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain, 1700-1900* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 305-6; S. York, 'Alienists, Attendants and the Containment of

discharge and one death but make no mention of anything untoward occurring.[130] The *Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy, Appendix A, Provincial Licensed Houses* shows no suicides recorded for Abington Abbey Retreat for 1868.[131] Showell may therefore have been repeating a rumour that persisted or grew in Birmingham circles, possibly occasioned by Edmonds' behaviour or by the fact that both his brother and nephew had taken their own lives.[132] All that can be said with certainty is that neither the Abington Visitors nor the Lunacy Commissioners reported any cause for alarm in Edmonds' case.

The obituaries published locally took the opportunity to retell the story of the early nineteenth-century Reform Movement, the *Midland Counties Express* suggesting that had his death occurred twenty years before, 'Birmingham would have put itself in mourning, at all events its liberal population, for unquestionably he was the idol of his day'.[133] The funeral held in Birmingham on 7 July 1868 was still an impressive affair. The body was brought by train from Northampton and at two o'clock a funeral procession left the Queen's Hotel, watched by many, and made its way to Key Hill Cemetery. The main figures included fellow Baptists, leading liberals and colleagues from his working and civil life. The pall-bearers were all co-religionists: chair of the General Hospital Board, former liberal alderman and leading gun-manufacturer Caleb Lawden, together with William Morgan and other prominent Baptists, T. Adams, J. C. Woodhill, A. Butler, and W. Wright.[134] The chief mourners were Mr

Suicide in Public Lunatic Asylums, 1845–1890', *Social History of Medicine,* Vol. 25, No. 2, (2012), pp. 324-342.

[130] *Abington Abbey Visitors' Book*, 1868.

[131] *23rd Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy, Appendix A Provincial Licensed Houses,* p. 119 (House of Commons papers 1868-9, Vol. 27).

[132] See Appendix, Edward Amos Edmonds and Family.

[133] *Midland Counties Express,* 4 July 1868, in BA&C Birmingham Scrapbook, Volume 1, Part 2A.

[134] The Morgan family, Adams and Woodhill had all transferred from Bond Street to Mount Zion Chapel to support it after George Dawson's move to the Church of the Saviour in the 1840s (A. Langley, *Birmingham Baptists*, p. 104). This, together with the fact that Charles Vince presided at the

Maher, a Liberal councillor, Timothy Massey, Edmonds' clerk, Alfred Walter, his former partner, and John Edensor together with Mrs Edensor, George's daughter Clarissa. Many others joined in, despite not having had invitations, including former members of the Birmingham Political Union. The service was held in the non-conformist chapel**,** the oration given by Reverend Charles Vince (1823–1874), the Baptist minister of Mount Zion Chapel.[135] Vince included a passionate defence of political engagement, expressing the ideals of the developing 'Civic Gospel', as well as celebrating Edmonds' career: 'For the firmness with which he maintained his convictions, and for the zeal and ability with which he advocated them, he will always have a name and a place in the history of his native town.'[136] There is no mention in the reports of George's second wife, but she is named in the burial record as the next-of-kin, Mary Edmonds. George was buried with his son Horace and first wife Patience.[137] Whatever the story of his last two years, spent in Leamington, Ashbourne and Northampton, his family and town firmly reclaimed him in his death.

Clarissa Edensor, who had dealt with her husband's death and her father's illness and death within a two-year period, soon moved to London to live with her third daughter, Patience, and later with her son, John, in Notting Hill.[138] She had been born in the middle of the turmoil of July 1819 but lived into the new century, dying aged 94 in a house in Royal Crescent, Notting Hill, leaving over £2,000.[139]

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funeral, suggests that Edmonds may have moved with them, but I have not found any records confirming or denying this.

[135] *Birmingham Daily Post*, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 8 July 1868; *ABG*, *BJ,* 11 July 1868. It was not fashionable for women to attend funerals in this period, but it was clearly acceptable for Clarissa Edmonds to be one of the chief mourners.

[136] *BJ*, 4 July 1868. For Charles Vince, see Appendix C.

[137] *Key Hill Cemetery Monumental Inscriptions*, p. 161; *Key Hill Cemetery Burial Records*: 1303 Horace Edmonds, 15339 Patience Edmonds and 20260 George Edmonds.

[138] See Appendix A, Family Trees, and Appendix C for Clarissa Edensor and family.

[139] *England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966, 1973-1995*, Clarissa Edensor, d. 8 May 1914, Middlesex England, Probate date 9 June 1914, London, England.

Edmonds was able to overcome lingering hostility from the leadership of the Birmingham Law Society and make what should have been a comfortable living in his later years. Responsibilities for his family, and at least one misguided financial decision, meant that he continued to be dogged by fears of poverty. The precariousness he had experienced in earlier years may have contributed to these fears. He was able to discharge his responsibilities as head of the wider family, but these burdens may have contributed to his illness and specifically to the grasping attitude he demonstrated in his late years. In fact, his own or the family's resources allowed him a place in a well-regarded private asylum. His legacy ensured that Clarissa was able to live in comfort.

He continued to play a role in the political and civic life of the town, part of what was increasingly referred to as the 'Liberal' interest, being prepared to support measures short of full universal male suffrage but retaining a belief that the extension of the franchise to the wider working population should be a priority. He worked with Sturge and others who favoured non-intervention or peaceful solutions to international conflict. The respect in which he was held at the end of his life is shown in the care taken over his retirement, the caution in reporting his illness, and the turn-out for his funeral.

Chapter Ten

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the life of George Edmonds, his political and civic engagement, his career and social mobility and in doing so has tested established views of Birmingham's social and political development and its radical tradition. It has combined archival investigation with modern electronic search methods to augment and, where necessary, challenge existing accounts. The introductory chapter laid out key themes relating to the nature of radicalism and degree of social cohesion in nineteenth-century Birmingham and suggested how a focus on the life of George Edmonds could shed light on these questions. It introduced several subordinate themes, including the role of Particular Baptist culture in Edmonds' upbringing and the significance of family structure, gender roles and responsibilities in his life.

This concluding chapter begins with a focus on Edmonds as an individual, summarising the findings of the thesis with regard to his ideas, work, family life, character and behaviour as a radical leader. It goes on to consider the implications of this study for the wider questions of the nature of radicalism, in Birmingham and nationally, and for an understanding of late Georgian and early Victorian Birmingham society. It offers an assessment of the biographical approach employed before coming to an overall conclusion and pointing to further areas of research.

The development of Edmonds' radical ideas

The thesis has uncovered several influences upon Edmonds' radical ideas. An examination of the culture and beliefs of the Particular Baptists in Chapter Two,

combined with a more detailed study of the Bond Street Chapel in Chapter Three, revealed one source of Edmonds' radicalism.[1] This investigation found that despite the desire of Baptists to avoid confrontation with the state, they shared with other dissenters a desire for religious and civic equality, providing fertile soil for the development of a minority strain of radical thought. Antagonism to the privileges of the established church can be traced in Edmonds' writings as well as in campaigns against church rates. Baptists were particularly engaged in abolitionist campaigns and combined paternalistic missionary activity with radical gospel-based egalitarianism, a position full of contradictions which nevertheless left room for a radical such as Edmonds to develop his ideas and outlook in an internationalist direction. However, Edmonds' thinking went beyond radical Baptist thought, for instance, in his attitude to the black-led government of Haiti, which marked a striking break with paternalism. His support for Catholic civil and religious rights also contrasted with mainstream dissenting views, which points to other influences on his beliefs.

Eliezer Edwards' suggestion that Edmonds had a good and wide-ranging education, expanded by his own habits of study, was confirmed using remembrances of George's father, Edward Edmonds. These revealed that the Reverend Edmonds, although primarily an active pastor rather than a scholar, was committed to education and wide reading.[2] The *Diary of Joseph Dixon* and the memoirs of members of the Unitarian Hill family, explored in Chapters Three and Four, revealed the young George Edmonds' interest in mechanical advances, especially in the

[1] BA&C 405889, *Bond Street Baptist Chapel Minute Book 1785-1828*, and, for example, R. Hall, *An apology for the freedom of the press, and for general liberty: To which are prefixed remarks on Bishop Horsley's sermon* (London, 1793).
[2] E. Edwards, 'George Edmonds', *Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men* (Birmingham, 1877); 'Anecdotes of Old Mr Edmonds', *BJ,* 19 September 1856.

printing process, and his love of discussing a wide range of ideas. By 1812 he was engaging with ideas of constitutional radicalism, as expressed in the *Midland Chronicle* and in the Committee of Artizans.[3]

Edmonds became a leading local advocate of the politics of popular, constitutional radicalism, advancing a programme which focused on political reform, especially an end to corruption, to achieve social improvement. In Chapters Four and Six, his own writings together with the *Reports* of mass meetings provide evidence of his thinking, although these are edited with an eye on government restrictions. They show that his was an eclectic approach, reflecting the influence of such diverse figures as Bentham and Paine and contemporary activists, especially T. J. Wooler, from the constitutional wing of popular radicalism. He continued to be an advocate of the programme of popular radicalism in the 1830s although this was modified by his commitment to the restricted aims of the Birmingham Political Union. In the early 1830s he showed an interest in Owenite ideas without fully embracing them. He combined a humanitarian approach with Benthamite principles on the need for the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number', for instance, in his views on capital punishment.[4]

[3] CRL, MS14, *Journals and Notebooks of Joseph Dixon, Notebook of Joseph Dixon*, 1832-1847; R. and F. Davenport Hill, *The Recorder of Birmingham: a Memoir of Matthew Davenport Hill with Selections from his Correspondence* (London: Macmillan, 1878); BA&C 62800, *A Report of the Proceedings of the Artizans of Birmingham at their Meeting Wednesday 17th June 1812* (Birmingham, 1812); BA&C 268744, *Midland Chronicle*, Vol. One, 1811-1814.

[4] HO 40/3/41, 'Letter to a Tradesman of Bath', [January 1817]; BA&C 151005, *Report of the Proceedings of the Town's Meeting held on Newhall Hill on Wednesday January 22nd, 1817* and subsequent meeting reports 1817- 1819*;* BA&C 61887, *Letter to the Inhabitants of Birmingham being a vindication of the conduct of the writer at the late Meeting at the Shakespeare* (Birmingham, 1817); *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder and Saturday Advertiser,* Nos. 1-8, 26 June-7 August 1819*; Edmonds's Weekly Register,* Nos 1-19, 8 August 1819 to 6 January 1820; *The Saturday's Register* Nos 1-7, 26 January-15 April 1820; BA&C 74226, *Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham*, II-IX, 1819; BA&C, Birmingham Institutions Vol. 2 Part 1, Political Union*; Midland Representative and Birmingham Herald*, 1831-2.

Chief among the ideas and projects that gripped Edmonds was his interest in the concept of a universal and 'philosophic' language. Chapter Eight examined his nearly lifelong work on this question and used evidence from Edmonds' own texts, as well as accounts of contemporary interest in language reform, to suggest that Edmonds' project related both to his radical internationalist sentiment and to a long-standing interest in philology.[5]

Edmonds' thinking was rooted in a radical Christian outlook that rejected privilege and valued social responsibility, to which were added ideas gleaned from both constitutional and Paineite radicalism, as well as the liberal Benthamite tradition. These beliefs were grounded by the experience of his family and surrounding community and further modified by his experience as a radical leader, discussed below.

The Edmonds family

The thesis has uncovered fresh details about the social background of the Edmonds family, about Edmonds' own social progress and the barriers that faced him. In Chapter Three, the biographical sketch produced by Eliezer Edwards was used to establish facts about Edmonds' early life while genealogical, newspaper and directory searches were used to expand and check this information. These confirmed the artisan background of the Edmonds family but also noted that individuals within it, including Edmonds' own father, were able to progress in either

[5] G. Edmonds, *The Philosophic Alphabet: with an explanation of its principles, and a variety of extracts, illustrating its adaptation to the sounds of the English language, and also of the Hebrew, Greek, French, Italian and Spanish, to which is added, a philosophic system of punctuation* (London: Simkin and Marshall, 1832); *A Universal Alphabet, Grammar and Language: comprising a scientific classification of the radical elements of discourse and illustrative translations from the holy scriptures and the principal British classics to which is added a Dictionary of the Language* (London: Richard Griffin, 1856).

the church or manufacturing. The *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book* confirmed that members of the congregation suffered distress and uncertainty in the war years. Edmonds' early experience contributed to his hatred of poverty and determination to ameliorate it, as revealed in his writings on the Poor Law, and formed the backdrop to his belief in the need for parliamentary and local reform.

In the early 1820s, as explored in Chapter Five, Edmonds and his family faced hardship as a result of his trial and imprisonment and, as outlined in Chapter Nine, his wider family continued to experience precariousness in life and work.[6] Newspaper accounts, census returns, and genealogical sources have all been used to uncover these stories. While they impart only glimpses of the heavy family responsibilities resting on Edmonds, they nevertheless provide evidence of experiences which might have confirmed his belief in the need for reform and also have contributed to his desire to end the precarious position of his own family. In Chapters Five and Nine, an examination of the *Minutes of the Birmingham Law Society* revealed that Edmonds faced class prejudice and professional opposition to his advancement.[7] These difficulties and barriers may have contributed to the political decisions which allowed him to be confirmed as Clerk of the Peace in 1839.

Two family stories previously hidden from the record have emerged during this research. An exploration of events surrounding Edmonds' trial and imprisonment using newspaper sources revealed that Edmonds' mother Sarah died the day after his conviction in 1820. The extent of the disabilities faced by George and Patience's

[6] See Chapter Nine and Appendix B, Edward Amos Edmonds.
[7] BA&C MSS 2830, *Records and Minutes of the Birmingham Law Society from 3rd January 1818 to 31 October 1857.*

son Horace have also been revealed. Both these stories cast light on Edmonds' later references to his sufferings in the early radical period.

This study of Edmonds' extremely busy life revealed the extent to which he and other men involved in civic and political activity must have been reliant on female support, either as wives or servants. The absence of female testimony, and the fact that women's experience has been under-investigated, means that there is a continuing gap in the record. However, two valuable and under-used or unused manuscript sources, the *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book* and *Diary of Joseph Dixon*, together with other local Baptist documents, confirmed that although this was a highly gendered society, Baptist women participated in church life and experienced a degree of independence. Newspaper advertisements highlighted the significant role played by Patience in the family's recovery through her retail as well as domestic work, but other activity, for example, in the church and its abolitionist or charitable initiatives, is hidden.

Edmonds' character

Significant aspects of Edmonds' character, abilities, strengths and weaknesses have also emerged. Eliezer Edwards' biographical sketch drew attention to Edmonds' hatred of oppression and his spirited campaigning, but also to his obsessive need to win legal arguments and his later idiosyncrasies in court. The memoir of leading Unitarian radical Joseph Luckcock noted Edmonds' habit of falling out with friends.[8] One possible source of Edmonds' love of argument might be the chapel environment in which he was raised. The *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book* revealed the independent, disputatious, controlling and yet supportive nature of the largely artisan

[8] J. Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs in Humble Life* (Birmingham, 1825).

congregation. Edmonds' debating skills were later honed through discussions with young dissenters, especially the Steers and Hills and then in the Hampden Club. This training did not modify his refusal to back down in an argument or prevent him becoming involved in feuds. In the early 1830s these traits made him a natural target for the scandal-mongering *Monthly Argus*, but his stubbornness also ensured that he was the person who was prepared to challenge its proprietor, Joseph Allday. Later in life, despite Edmonds' pragmatic political approach, he was still unwilling to retreat, something revealed in his dispute with Feargus O'Connor as well as in court. The use of print sources with alternative viewpoints – for instance, the Tory *Monthly Argus* and pro-BPU *Birmingham Journal* – has been important in piecing together these stories.[9]

Edmonds could be impetuous, a characteristic demonstrated in his early romance and engagement, but forestalled in his private life by marriage to the well-named Patience. On the other hand, he showed an adherence to habit, for example, in the way in which he rose early every morning to work on his language projects. The ways in which these different characteristics were played out in his behaviour as a radical leader are discussed below.

Edmonds' abilities, combined with his egotistical determination, helped him to rebuild both his working and political life after his imprisonment and social isolation. His considerable ego and single-minded ambition enabled him to overcome many hurdles to finally achieve his legal qualifications. Newspaper reports have been invaluable in confirming Eliezer Edwards' account of his working life, conveying a

[9] *Birmingham Journal; Birmingham Argus and Public Censor*, 1828-9, *Monthly Argus and Public Censor* 1829-33.

flavour of Edmonds' use of humour in court and the fact that he represented poorer sections of the community.

The obsessive trait in his character could be observed in his early attempt to invent a new type-casting machine and in his later work on a new alphabet and language. This obsessive behaviour increased in his later years, together with other features of mental breakdown, affecting his willingness to retire. His second marriage was shown to have had a basis in previous family connections, but its short-lived nature has been confirmed. Official asylum records, together with contemporary newspaper reports, have augmented the accounts given by Eliezer Edwards of the breakdown in Edmonds' mental health, and suggest that he was treated with respect and care in this final period.[10]

Edmonds as a radical leader

Edmonds' ideas, background and personal characteristics were reflected in his behaviour as a radical leader – behaviour which was modified by experience. Edmonds' impulsive and occasionally obstreperous behaviour was mitigated by planning and forethought. His fallings-out were in general balanced by an ability to work with others. His use of invective was directed at the more powerful. The thesis has also revealed how the pressures of personal and group responsibility weighed on the shoulders of this provincial radical leader, strengthening his pragmatism and desire to build an alliance with middle-class radicals. The study has revealed how Edmonds struggled to reconcile political principle with this pragmatic approach; in

[10] BA&C MSS 344, All Saints Mental Hospital 1850 -1973**,** 5/1 *Register of Admissions for Private Patients,* Patient No. 538*;* Northampton Records Office, LG1/CC/424, *Abington Abbey Visitors' Book*, 1868; LG1/CC/486/1-8, Abington Abbey Asylum July-August 1868, *Notice of the death of a patient,* George Edmonds, died 1 July 1868; LG1/CC/491/1-20 Abington Abbey Retreat. *Private Patient Admission Statement* George Edmonds.

the period 1830-32 he attempted to keep a foot in both camps – one with the BPU's middle-class leadership and one with those radicals committed to more thoroughgoing political reform. This balancing act came to grief in the period of early Chartism when the BPU split. Detailed analysis of the record carried in the local and national radical press has prompted the suggestion that a combination of Edmonds' personal ambition, family responsibilities and ideological viewpoint contributed to his decision-making during the 1838-39 crisis. He moved into the town's middle class but at the cost of abandoning former allies. An examination of his later political engagement in Chapter Nine indicates that he made a journey from radicalism to liberalism, but also that he retained elements of thinking from his popular radical days, especially in international matters.

The political culture of Birmingham radicalism

This thesis has provided a fresh perspective on the debate about the degree of political and social cohesion in Birmingham in this period and on the nature of radicalism in Birmingham in the early and mid-nineteenth century.[11] By examining the life of a lesser-known, but significant, local political figure it has shown that while Birmingham was less riven by class divisions than some other areas, there were times of intense political and social conflict, in which Edmonds participated. Using

[11] A. Briggs, 'Thomas Attwood and the economic background to the Birmingham Political Union', [1948] in *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs,* Volume I (Brighton: Harvester, 1985); Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: Odhams Press, 1963), pp. 187-191; Briggs, 'Political and Administrative History: Political History from 1832', in *VCH Warwickshire*, *Vol. Seven*, pp. 298-317; R.B. Rose, 'Political and Administrative History: Political History to 1832', in *VCH Warwickshire*, *Vol. 7*, pp. 270-297**;** C. Behagg, 'Myths of Cohesion: capital and compromise in the historiography of nineteenth-century Birmingham', *Social History,* October 1986, pp. 375-384; G. Barnsby, *Birmingham Working People* (Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services, 1989); Behagg, *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1990); E. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town: Birmingham and the Industrial Revolution* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), pp. 178-185; R. Ward, *City-State and Nation: Birmingham's Political History, 1830-40* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2005), pp. 8-14.

Home Office and Treasury Solicitor's records as well as the radical and local press, the examination, in Chapter Four, of Edmonds' role in the Newhall Hill meeting of 1819 has revealed significant detail about the magistrates' relationship with the Home Office.[12] Although the town avoided open physical conflict and the use of troops, the local and national state combined forces against the reformers.

The focus on Edmonds' individual political journey has provided a new viewpoint on the political events covered in Chapters Six and Seven, which look at the BPU and early Chartism. The work of the BPU provides the most striking special feature of Birmingham politics in the period. This coalition between currency reformers and popular radicals sustained an expression of political radicalism marked by class cooperation. However, the exploration of Edmonds' role in the BPU confirms that the coalition was difficult to maintain and that the BPU leadership itself came close to illegality in the Autumn of 1831 as well as in the Days of May. Edmonds and other radicals were engaged in a range of political campaigns in the 1830s, and political alliances were fluid. Independent working-class pressure ensured the re-launch of the BPU on a radical programme and this, together with the emergence of different interests relating to the achievement of the corporation charter, contributed to the split in Birmingham Chartism. The study of Edmonds' role, his shifting position from a facilitator of a class alliance to an inability to reconcile two opposing sides, has illuminated these events. The idea that there was a special form of class-cohesive Birmingham radicalism throughout the nineteenth century cannot be sustained.

[12] TNA TS 25/2035 ff.141-51, *Opinion of Law Officers in the King v Edmonds, regarding the meeting about electing a House of Commons/Parliamentary representative on 12 July 1819 on New Hall Hill, Birmingham, Warwickshire…29 July 1819;* TS 11/695/2206, *Rex v George Edmonds; Charles Maddocks; John Cartwright; Thomas Jonathan Wooler and William Greathead Lewis for a conspiracy and misdemeanour: Warwickshire Spring Assizes, 1820.*

The survey of Edmonds' political activities at different periods has cast light on the wider culture of radicalism and the range of methods employed to variously challenge the town's elite, cement alliances and express political standpoints. Edmonds engaged with existing civic organisations, as revealed in the Guardians' Minutes.[13] Political debate continued to be sharp and sometimes raucous throughout the period, for example, in the church rates dispute which included violent scenes in St Martin's. There was contestation over the use of space as well as careful management of it for parades and mass meetings. The detail of much discussion that took place in ordinary meetings of clubs and organisations is mostly hidden from the record. However, the wide variety of campaigns in which Edmonds and others were engaged, the presence of the radical press in town, the banners carried in parades, all suggest a considerable cross-fertilisation of ideas, for instance, in the 1830s, between popular radicalism, Owenism, the campaigns against the taxes on knowledge and for religious liberty. Edmonds' use of language, derived from both his church background and this radical milieu, is inventive, full of metaphor, humour and irony, and might lend itself to further study.

The thesis has allowed an examination of the ways in which the programme of popular radicalism was applied in Birmingham. It was promoted in print, in meetings and through symbols in the post-Napoleonic War period by Edmonds and his co-thinkers. It was also applied to circumstance within the town itself, to call for greater popular participation in local affairs. Edmonds was later able to take both the programme of popular radicalism and its local adherents into the BPU's coalition, but he abandoned elements of the programme to maintain the alliance with Attwood.

[13] BA&C GP/B/2/1/2, *Birmingham Union Board of Guardians, Minutes 1807-1826.*

Although popular radical ideas were revived in early Chartism, and facets of the programme were embraced by the BPU leadership, differences emerged over aims, ambitions and tactics, forcing a split. Both ideology and class interest played a part in the disintegration of the BPU's political alliance.

The thesis has confirmed that dissenters played a significant role in the growth of radicalism in the town but not necessarily in a seamless fashion. The part played by the Hill family, James Luckcock and W. Hawkes Smith in aiding Edmonds and his fellow plebeian radicals in the post-war reform movement was important, but they were a minority among Unitarians in that period. Whig-leaning Unitarians did become active in support of political reform in the late 1820s, but most did not join the BPU until the latter phases of the campaign for the Reform Bill in 1832. The thesis has shown that several Baptists, including Edmonds, played a role in the reform movement and has also confirmed that the wider dissenter community was key in sustaining the campaign against church rates. However, further investigation might uncover the extent of political and civic participation from the less privileged sections of dissent and a prosopographical approach could be helpful here.

Two influential and contrasting strands of thought deserve further exploration. One is popular loyalism, which coalesced in response to dissenter radicalism in the late 1790s and was significant in the post-war period: further work might focus on whether and how this was maintained in the 1820s and 1830s, emerging in popular support for the Tory interest. Another area for research is the internationalist viewpoint expressed by Edmonds and the growth of tension between it and the traditional patriotism associated with constitutional radicalism, especially as pro-colonial feeling developed in the mid-nineteenth century.

The thesis has not uncovered evidence of specific organisations of women reformers before the creation of the Female Political Union in 1838. However, some extra glimpses of women's participation in the Newhall Hill meetings, at reform dinners, and in cooperative circles has been found. Further work using electronic searches might take this forward and might include an investigation of any cross-over between female anti-slavery activity and radical movements and the extent of Owenite influence.

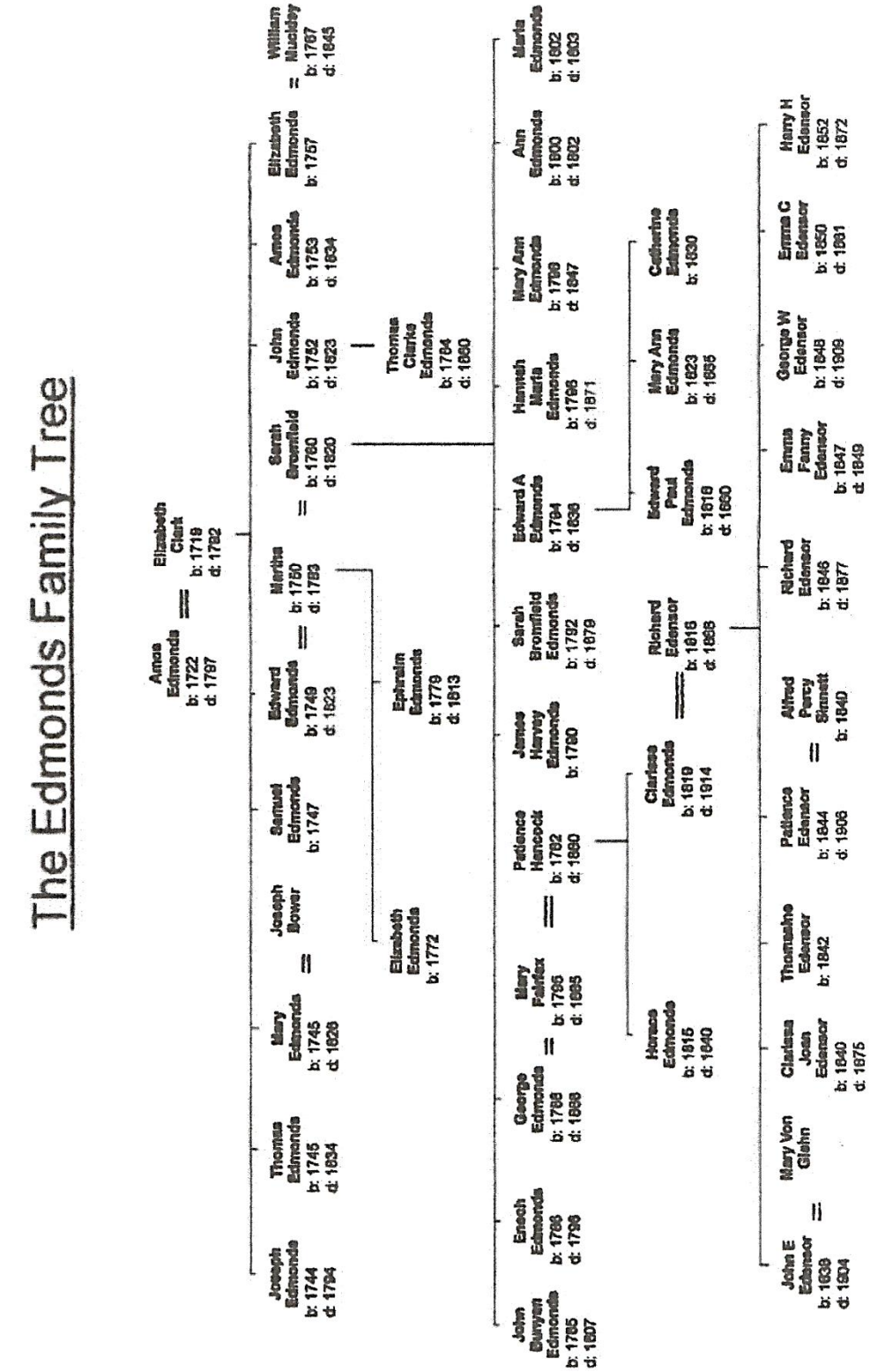
Edmonds' impact on political developments in the town in the first half of the nineteenth century was considerable, both in leading the post-war radical movement and maintaining the BPU's coalition. His role in these events, which had a national impact, means that he can be considered a significant provincial radical leader.[14] His role in the split in early Chartism was important locally but was not decisive at a national level.

This life of George Edmonds has cast new light on several important themes in Birmingham's history. The biographical approach, and range of sources used, has allowed an examination of the challenges facing an ambitious individual committed to social and political reform. It has been shown that, while political and social cohesion in the town was not entirely a myth, it had limits. Edmonds himself became committed to the idea of working-class and middle-class cooperation to pursue the

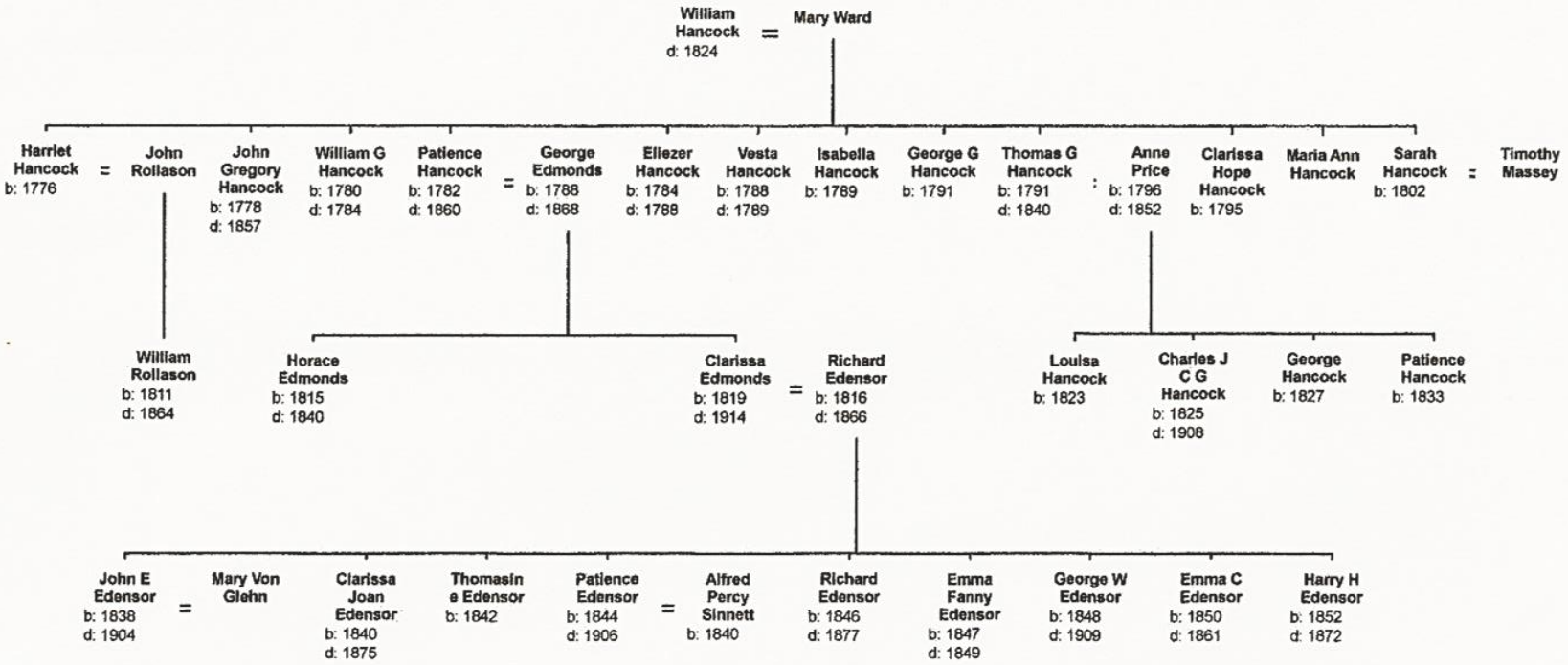
[14] Another area of research might involve comparative studies of working-class provincial radicals from the early-nineteenth century, such as Samuel Bamford of Manchester or Joseph Gales of Sheffield or spinners' organiser, John Doherty.

reform agenda but was rebuffed at some points and unable to stand in the way of class conflict at others. He was able to make social progress and eventually fulfil his employment ambitions, but he was frequently thwarted in these goals. Birmingham was a town of opportunities, but these opportunities were not equally open to all.

APPENDIX A


The Edmonds Family Tree
Amos Edmonds b: 1722 d: 1797
Elizabeth Clark b: 1719 d: 1782
Joseph Edmonds b: 1744 d: 1794
Thomas Edmonds b: 1745 d: 1834
Mary Edmonds b: 1745 d: 1826
Joseph Bower
Samuel Edmonds b: 1747
Edward Edmonds b: 1749 d: 1823
Martha b: 1750 d: 1783
Sarah Bromfield b: 1760 d: 1820
John Edmonds b: 1752 d: 1823
Amos Edmonds b: 1753 d: 1834
Elizabeth Edmonds b: 1757
William Muckley b: 1757 d: 1843
Elizabeth Edmonds b: 1772
Ephraim Edmonds b: 1779 d: 1813
Thomas Clarke Edmonds b: 1784 d: 1860
John Bunyan Edmonds b: 1785 d: 1807
Enoch Edmonds b: 1786 d: 1796
George Edmonds b: 1788 d: 1868
Mary Fairfax b: 1795 d: 1885
Patience Hancock b: 1782 d: 1860
James Harvey Edmonds b: 1780
Sarah Bromfield Edmonds b: 1792 d: 1879
Edward A Edmonds b: 1794 d: 1838
Hannah Maria Edmonds b: 1796 d: 1871
Mary Ann Edmonds b: 1798 d: 1847
Ann Edmonds b: 1800 d: 1802
Maria Edmonds b: 1802 d: 1803
Horace Edmonds b: 1815 d: 1840
Clarissa Edmonds b: 1819 d: 1914
Richard Edensor b: 1816 d: 1868
Edward Paul Edmonds b: 1818 d: 1860
Mary Ann Edmonds b: 1823 d: 1885
Catherine Edmonds b: 1830
John E Edensor b: 1838 d: 1904
Mary Von Glahn
Clarissa Joan Edensor b: 1840 d: 1875
Thomashe Edensor b: 1842
Patience Edensor b: 1844 d: 1908
Alfred Percy Sinnett b: 1840
Richard Edensor b: 1846 d: 1877
Emma Fanny Edensor b: 1847 d: 1849
George W Edensor b: 1848 d: 1909
Emma C Edensor b: 1850 d: 1881
Harry H Edensor b: 1852 d: 1872

The Hancock Family Tree



APPENDIX B

Edward Amos Edmonds and family

Edward Amos Edmonds was born in 1794, the youngest of Edward Edmonds' sons, and six years after George.[1] He worked as a journalist and later as an attorney's clerk, mostly in London. He was a committed radical, and for a period was associated with London 'ultra' radicals. His family story contains disruption and tragedy that impacted on George's own family.

Edward married Ann Wilkinson Horton, daughter of gold and silver cutter and polisher, Daniel Horton, in 1814 when both were minors.[2] They moved to London where Edward worked as a reporter and their son Edward Paul Edmonds was born in 1818.[3] A daughter, Mary Anne, was born about 1823 and Catherine about 1830.[4] In early 1819, Edward was still making an uncertain living as a reporter in London: he lost work after he tried to present himself as an accredited *Times* reporter when this was no longer the case. In a subsequent court case, Edward's lawyer described him as one of 'a class of persons who obtained their livelihood by collecting information for newspapers, the Police Offices of the metropolis being the source from whence the greater part of their articles are derived'.[5]

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[1] *Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths surrendered to the Non-Parochial Registers Commissions of 1837 and 1857*; Class Number: RG 4; Piece Number: 3113**,** Birmingham, Bond Street (Baptist), 1775-1837, birth of Edward Amos Edmonds, 23 March 1794.
[2] *Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937*, 21 February 1814, Handsworth, St Mary, DRO 86/26, Archive Roll: Reel 2, marriage of Edward Amos Edmonds and Ann Wilkinson Horton; *Wrightson's Triennial Directory of Birmingham* 1818, p. 67.
[3] *London, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1906,* London Metropolitan Archives, Westminster St Martin in the Fields, Register of Baptism, DL/T/093, Item 021, 13 October 1818, birth of Edward Paul Edmonds.
[4] No birth records can be found so these dates rely on a combination of census and marriage evidence. The report of Edward's death says there were five children, but no others can be traced.
[5] *The Times*, 30 November 1820, Law Report, Court of Kings Bench, 29 November 1820; *Evening Mail*, 1 December 1820. No first name for 'Edmonds' is given but his later employment makes it probable that this was Edward.

In 1819, Edward moved back to Birmingham and in July was selling the radical press, including the *Black Dwarf* and the *British Gazette,* possibly in rooms of his own but more probably when staffing George's coffee rooms.[6] He also acted as a reporter for George's press.[7] According to a Home Office informer's report, Edward acted as a Birmingham delegate to the radical meeting held at the White Horse Tavern, London, at the end of August 1819, at which he stated that Birmingham radicals were well-armed but were waiting for London to take a lead in any (unspecified) action.[8] This implies sympathy with the ultra-radical position but, in suggesting the lead had to come from elsewhere, he did not commit Birmingham radicals to a definite break from the constitutionalist position of his brother or the Birmingham Union Society.

Over the next year, he appears to have maintained a variant of this position, never quite tipping into supporting conspiracy or insurrection. He moved back to London, was present at several radical meetings in late 1819 and early 1820 and, according to Iorwerth Prothero, was associated with the ultra-radical group around James Watson and Arthur Thistlewood, writing for various radical newspapers. [9] David Worrall identifies him as the editor of the *Democratic Recorder and Reformers' Guide*, a journal that supported the idea of an armed citizenry.[10] This was a period of feverish discussion and debate on the best way to advance the radical cause in the context of the repression.[11] He sided with Robert Wedderburn in arguing against a

[6] *Edmonds's Weekly Recorder and Saturday Advertiser*, No 6, 31 July 1819. George's daughter Clarissa was born in July so Patience would have been confined or nursing.
[7] *Edmonds's Weekly Register,* No 5, 25 September 1819.
[8] HO 42/194, ff. 373-4.
[9] I. Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and his Times* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1979), pp. 118-123. Prothero wrongly identifies Edward Edmonds as George's son, but all the information fits an identification of this 'Edmonds' being George's brother Edward.
[10] D. Worrall, *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance, 1790-1820* (London: Breviary Stuff, 2019), p. 143.
[11] M. Chase, *1820, Disorder and Stability in the United Kingdom* (Manchester: MUP, 2013), pp. 44-55.

premature rising and he remained a proponent of the idea of simultaneous meetings.[12] In the summer of 1820, when much of the radical movement became involved in the Queen Caroline affair, Edward was one of the minority who wanted to continue the focus on parliamentary reform.[13] There is no evidence that he was involved in the Cato Street Conspiracy but he was a member of a committee to raise money for the conspirators' defence and the Home Office received a request from him to visit Thistlewood in jail at the end of April 1820.[14] He was part of a 'Liberal Alliance' formed by Thomas Wooler, Gale Jones, and W.G Lewis in Spring 1820. Prothero suggests that the aim of this body was to keep communications going under cover of the appeal for relief, a tactic made necessary by the Six Acts.[15] In fact both communication and funds were needed and Edward's involvement was logical, given that Wooler and Lewis were awaiting trial alongside George Edmonds.

Edward continued his involvement with the radical press and tried to re-establish himself as a respectable journalist. In 1825 he was involved in an attempt to bring out a trades newspaper, the *Journeyman, and Artizans' London Chronicle*, but this only lasted a few issues.[16] By 1830, perhaps following his brother's example, he was working as an attorney's clerk. On a visit to Birmingham in late 1830, he came to the attention of the *Monthly Argus*, which was then making frequent attacks on George as 'Munchausen' Edmonds.[17] The *Argus* reported that, at a Political Union dinner, Edward had claimed to be a reporter for the *Morning Chronicle,* despite the fact that he had been 'turned off' by that paper and now practised at Bow-Street Police Office

[12] Prothero, *Artisans and Politics,* p. 123. For Wedderburn see P. Linebaugh and M. Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso, 2012), pp. 287-326.
[13] Prothero, *Artisans and Politics,* p. 145.
[14] HO 44/6/33, ff. 101-2, 113-114, Request from Edward Edmonds, 29 April 1820 and 30 April 1820,
[15] Prothero, *Artisans and Politics,* pp. 131-2.
[16] Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, p. 188-9*, Artizan's Chronicle*, June 1825.
[17] See Chapter Six.

'like Munchausen in our Birmingham Office – as clerk to some battered, broken-down, vagabond limb of the law'.[18] Even allowing for the *Argus*'s usual exaggerations, this suggests that Edward's living was rather precarious. Edward spent the early 1830s acting as an attorney's clerk to a Mr Lewis and continuing to work where possible as a journalist, with both activities centred on the police courts.[19] On one occasion Edward, or his attorney's office, clarified that he was not related to the George Edmonds who had appeared as a 'solicitor' for the defence of an individual associated with the National Union of the Working Classes.[20]

Edward's wife Ann died in 1832 'after a short illness'. She was buried under her maiden name of Ann Horton at the cemetery of Whitefield's Memorial Church, a leading non-conformist church in Tottenham Court Road.[21] The combination of family tragedy and uncertain employment was fatal: in April 1836 Edward killed himself. The *Gentleman's Magazine* referred to him as 'the son of a Baptist minister, and brother to Mr George Edmonds, the radical leader of Birmingham. He has left an orphan family of five children, the mother having been dead several years'.[22] The report in the *Morning Post* gave more details of the inquest:

> …to inquire into the death of Mr Edmund [sic] Edmonds, aged 42, late editor of the 'Metropolitan Police Gazette' and a gentleman, for years past, well known in the literary world. It appeared in evidence that the deceased had

[18] *Monthly Argus,* Vol.2-3, No.6, December 1830, pp. 326-328.
[19] For example, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, November 1834, trial of Samuel Reed (t18341124-194), www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 (accessed 1 October 2016). Edward Edmonds was acting for the defence.
[20] *Morning Advertiser*, 11 and 13 May 1833. See Appendix E for the 'The Two Radical George Edmonds'.
[21] *Morning Chronicle*, 17 August 1832; *London, England, Non-conformist Registers, 1694-1921*. London Metropolitan Archives; Clerkenwell, London, England; Whitefield's Memorial Church [Formerly Tottenham Court Road Chapel], Tottenham Court Road, Saint Pancras, Register of Burials; Reference Code: LMA/4472/A/01/005.
[22] *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Series 2, Vol. 5 (1836), p. 672.

> put an end to his existence by cutting his throat with a razor in so dreadful a manner as to cause immediate death, and that he had been suffering for some time great depression of spirits from pecuniary embarrassment and dread of arrest. – Verdict, 'Temporary mental derangement.'[23]

This report confirms that Edward was well-known as a journalist but had failed to establish any regularity of employment to support his family. Edward's burial was registered at the Baptist burial ground at Whitehall.[24]

The fate of three of the children can be traced. The eldest, Edward Paul Edmonds, may have been taken in by George and Patience as early as 1820.[25] Edward Paul joined the new Birmingham police, and was resident in the St. Thomas police house at the time of the 1841 census.[26] When he married Elizabeth Gregory Bland in August 1841, he was described as an Inspector of Police; George Edmonds was one of the witnesses.[27] Edward Paul and Elizabeth had nine children, two of whom, George and Frederick, stayed with their maternal grandparents, while the rest of the family moved to Aston Road.[28] Inspector Edmonds appeared as a familiar figure in the Birmingham press in the 1840s and 1850s, suggesting that he had a successful career.[29]

However, in 1860, Inspector Edmonds was forced out of office after accusations of misappropriation of funds. There was a bitter argument about this on the Council of

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[23] *Morning Post*, 18 April 1836.
[24] *Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths Surrendered to the Non-Parochial Registers Commissions of 1837 and 1857;* Class Number: RG 4*;* Piece 4206: Whitehall, Wild Street, Little, Lincoln's Inn Fields (Baptist), 1835-1837, Edward Edmonds, burial, 20 April 1836, age 42, Whitehall, London.
[25] George Edmonds referred to having three children under his care in his speech for mitigation of sentence in June 1821; *Birmingham Chronicle*, 7 June 1821.
[26] *England 1841 Census,* Birmingham, Police Section Houses.
[27] *Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937,* 21 August 1841, Birmingham St Philip, DRO 25, Archive Roll: M50.
[28] *England 1851 Census,* Birmingham St George; England 1851 Census, Aston, Duddeston.
[29] For example, *BJ,* 9 May 1840, 12 June 1847, 30 May 1857.

Birmingham Corporation and a campaign in Edward Edmonds' favour, which was to no avail. A memorial raised enough funds to allow him to open an ironmonger's shop, but the affair affected his mind and he took his own life in July 1860 at the age of 41.[30] His widow Elizabeth stayed on in Aston Road, making a living as a hosier and ironmonger.[31] Sons George and Edward studied hard at the Birmingham and Midland Institute, George winning two of the English prizes in 1862.[32] Edward was the Institute's 'most successful language student', and pursued a career as a specialist foreign correspondence clerk.[33]

At least two other children of Edward Amos Edmonds and Ann Horton were helped by the intervention of relatives. Mary Ann Edmonds was living with George and Patience in Whittall Street at the time of the 1841 census. Her age is given as 15 but this would have been a rounded-down age; later census data suggests she was 18 at the time.[34] It is probable that she stayed with George and Patience until she married John Thornton, a solicitor's clerk, in 1847 and moved to the East Midlands.[35] Mary Ann died a year after the death of her eleventh child, aged 42.[36]

The suicides of Edward Amos Edmonds and his son Edward Paul, the early death of his wife, and subsequently of Mary Anne, raise the possibility of family illness, even of a condition such as syphilis which might lead to mood swings and poor outcomes for

[30] *BJ,* 24 Dec 1859; *Birmingham Daily Post,* 4 April 1860, 16 July 1860; *ABG*, 9 January 1860, 20 February 1860, 21 July 1860 and 18 August 1860; *England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837-1915*, Aston, Warwickshire, Vol 6d, p. 113, death of Edward Paul Edmonds.
[31] *England 1861 Census*, Aston, Duddeston. The 1861 census shows that George had become a railway clerk and Frederick a gun-finisher while Mary Ann worked as a hosier with her mother.
[32] *ABG,* 18 January 1862. However, this talented young man himself died early in 1866 aged 24, *Birmingham Daily Gazette,* 18 May 1866.
[33] R. Waterhouse, *The Birmingham and Midland Institute 1854-1954* (Birmingham: BMI, 1954); *England 1881 Census*, Warwickshire, Edgbaston, King's Norton.
[34] *England 1841 Census,* Birmingham, St Mary. George was not at home on the night of the census.
[35] E*ngland & Wales, Free BMD Marriage Index, 1837-1915*, Birmingham, Warwickshire, Vol. 16, p. 429, 1847 Q.2, Marriage of John Thornton and Mary Anne Edmonds.
[36] *England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837-1915*, Radford, Nottinghamshire, Vol.7b, p.105, 1865 Q4, Death of Mary Anne Thornton.

children. However, other facts weigh against this. Edward Paul Edmonds was apparently in good health and had an active career in the police until his dismissal, and the death of Mary Anne after bearing eleven children was not unusual. Another daughter lived a long life. Catherine Edmonds was taken in by a maternal aunt, Matilda Biddle.[37] In 1849, aged 20, she married Thomas Moore, a jeweller, and lived in the Hockley area, until they emigrated to the United States in July 1873.[38] According to a number of family researchers, they converted to the Mormon religion and settled in Providence, Rhode Island, maintaining a jewellery business, and both living into the new century.[39]

[37] *1841 England Census*, Birmingham, St Paul.
[38] *Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937,* 14 January 1849, Birmingham St Martin, DRO 34, Archive Roll: M118, Marriage of Thomas Moore and Catherine Edmonds; *1871 England Census*, Birmingham, St George, *New York Passenger Lists 1820-1957*, Microfilm serial: M237, Roll M237-379, Line 27, List no.754.
[39] For example, *Weaver-Metcalf family tree*; http://person.ancestry.co.uk/tree/1162344/person/-1848633012/facts (accessed 5 January 2018). Shena Mason and Francesca Carnevali have traced connections between Birmingham and Rhode Island jewellers, although neither mention the Moore family; S. Mason, *Jewellery Making in Birmingham, 1750-1995* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1995), p. 60*;* F. Carnevali, 'Fashioning Luxury for Factory Girls: American Jewelry, 1860–1914', *Business History Review* 85, No. 2 (2011), pp. 295–317.

APPENDIX C

Biographical details of individuals

Allday, Joseph (1798-1861) was a Tory-Radical publisher of the satirical and scandal-mongering *Monthly Argus* from 1829-1834. He was later a Town Councillor and member of the 'Economist' council which opposed an expansion of spending. He exposed mistreatment in the Court of Requests and Borough Gaol.[1]

Attwood, Thomas (1783-1856) was a banker and currency theorist who became founder and chair of the Birmingham Political Union, and subsequently MP for Birmingham from 1832 until 1839. A Tory by upbringing, his commitment to currency reform and consciousness of distress in periods of poor trade led him to embrace the idea of moderate parliamentary reform and a campaign that linked the 'industrious classes'.[2]

Baker, Thomas (dates unknown) was an organiser of the unemployed. He chaired the Committee for Unemployed Artisans in 1832 and helped form the short-lived Midland Union of the Working Classes, although not breaking from the BPU. In 1837, he was part of the Working Men's Memorial Committee which called for action against distress and pressed the revived BPU to support universal male suffrage.[3]

Bibb, James (dates unknown), 'a mechanic', was a supporter of a more radical programme in the BPU, challenging the compromise made by the Political Council in May 1830. He was quickly taken onto the Political Council and later became

[1] T. Harman and W. Showell, *Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1885), pp. 318-320; A. Briggs, 'Press and Public in Early Nineteenth-Century Birmingham' [1949], in Briggs, *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs,* Vol. 1 (Brighton: Harvester, 1985), pp.120-122; R. Ward, *City –State and Nation: Birmingham's Political History 1830-1940* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2005), p. 52.

[2] D. Moss, *Thomas Attwood: the Biography of a Radical* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1990); C. Behagg, 'Attwood, Thomas (1783–1856), politician and currency theorist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-878 (accessed 24 August 2020).

[3] *BJ*, 22 September 1832, 3 June, 7 October 1837; C. Behagg, *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 179, 191.

treasurer of the West Bromwich Political Union. He or family members may have been members of the Newhall Street Baptist Church.[4]

Birt, Reverend Isaiah (1758-1837) was pastor of Cannon Street Baptist Church from 1813 to 1825. A supporter of the French Revolution and critic of the French Wars, he came under surveillance from government agents.[5] **Mrs Birt** was a subscriber to the Ladies' Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves in its first year.[6]

Bower, Joseph (1744-?), buckle-maker, married George's aunt, Mary Edmonds. A Joseph Bower appears on the Artisan's Committee of 1812.[7]

Brandis, Joseph (dates unknown) was a radical book seller, imprisoned for a year in November 1819 for selling a libellous address.[8]

Bromfield, Sarah (1760-1820), mother of George Edmonds, was the daughter of George Bromfield, a gun-stocker and a legatee in his will. She was a member of the Cannon Street Church before moving to the Bond Street Chapel. She married Reverend Edward Edmonds in 1784.[9]

Brown, Edward (dates unknown) was a Chartist, a journeyman silversmith, member of the Rent Committee, appointed to the Convention after the resignations of BPU leaders. He was jailed in April 1840 for eighteen months. In some accounts he is

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[4] BA&C MS 670/20, Account of monies received by John Edmonds of the Baptist Meeting House, Newhall St 1820-21; BA&C 442195, *Report of the Proceedings of the First Meeting of the Birmingham Political Union Held at Mr Beardsworth's Repository on Monday May 17th 1830* (Birmingham, 1830), pp. 8-9, 13; A. Briggs, 'The Background to the Parliamentary Reform Movement in Three English Cities 1830-32' [1952], in Briggs, *The Collected Essays,* pp. 180-213, 204 n.

[5] A. Langley, *Birmingham Baptists Past and Present, prepared for the West Midland Baptist Association* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1939) p. 35; J. Briggs, 'Elite and Proletariat in Nineteenth-century Birmingham Nonconformity', in A. Sell (ed), *Protestant Non-Conformists and the West Midlands of England* (Keele: KUP, 1996), p. 73.

[6] BA&C MS 3173/2 (a), *First Report of the Ladies' Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves, 1826*, p. 23. The Birts moved to London after Reverend Birt's resignation from ill-health which may explain why her name is not found again in the MSS.

[7] *Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937,* DRO 34/M108, Birmingham, St Martin, 18 May 1766, Marriage of Joseph Bower and Mary Edmunds [sic]. See also Chapter Four.

[8] J. Langford, *A Century of Birmingham Life, or a chronicle of local events 1741-1841* Vol.2 (Birmingham: E.C. Osborne 1868), p. 436.

[9] DRO 25/ M140*,* Birmingham, St Philip, 10 October 1760, baptism of Sarah Bromfield*;* DRO 25/ M45. Birmingham, St Philip, 28 April 1784, Marriage of Edward Edmonds and Sarah Bromfield; TNA, Prerogative Court of Canterbury and Related Probate Jurisdictions: Will Registers; Class: PROB 11; Piece: 1255, Will of George Bromfield; BA&C, BC 2/2/5/1, *Cannon Street Church Book;* C. Scarse, *Birmingham 120 Years Ago* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1896), p. 8.

described as a ‘labourer’; he may have been in and out of work as a silversmith because of poor trade or because of his activities.[10]

Burn, Reverend Edward (1762-1837), minister of St Mary’s Chapel, opponent of Joseph Priestley, he continued to oppose radical ideas in the post-war period and published a sermon ‘A Word for my King, my Country and my God’ in the autumn of 1819.[11]

Clark Family. Thomas Clark senior (?-1847), toy manufacturer, member of the Street Commissioners and the Board of Guardians was, with fellow Unitarians James Luckcock and Thomas Wright Hill, a member of the Society for Constitutional Information in the 1790s. He maintained his radical sympathies in the war and post-war periods. **Thomas Clark Junior** (1794-?), glass-house manufacturer and constitutional radical, attended Newhall Hill meetings and was a supporter of T.J Wooler.[12]

Collins, John (1802-1852), Chartist, was a toolmaker for Joseph Gillott’s steel pen factory. He toured the north of England and Scotland on behalf of the BPU in 1838. He was arrested with William Lovett during the Chartist Convention in Birmingham and spent a year in jail. He was welcomed back to Birmingham by a crowd estimated at 70,000. Subsequently he was associated with Arthur O’Neill. He became a town councillor in 1847.[13]

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[10] C. Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union and the Movements for Reform in Britain 1830-39* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1978), p. 166; J. Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O’Connor and the Chartist Movement 1832-1842* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 10; G. Barnsby, *Birmingham Working People*, (Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services, 1989), pp. 83, 88; C. Behagg, *Politics and Production,* p. 200.

[11] E. Burn*, A Word for my King, my Country and my God: being the substance of a discourse lately addressed to the congregation of St. Mary's, Birmingham, 3rd edition* (Birmingham: Beilby and Knotts, 1819); J. Langford, *A Century of Birmingham Life,* Vol. 2 (Birmingham: E.C. Osborne 1868), p. 429; J. Money, *Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands 1760-1800* (Manchester: MUP, 1977), p. 215, n.30. Burn was thought by some to be author of the Job Nott letters rather than, or in addition to, Theodore Price. (BA&C, Birmingham Scrapbook Vol. 3 Part One, p. 75).

[12] BA&C MS 1114/3-8, *Autobiographical Notebooks of Thomas Clark, 1816-18*; H. Smith, *Propertied Society and Public Life: The Social History of Birmingham, 1780-1832* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 2013), pp. 321-327.

[13] W. Lovett and J. Collins, *Chartism, a New Organisation of the People* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1968 [1841?]); https://www.chartistcollins.com/ (accessed 27 August 2020).

Cooke, Samuel (1786-1861) was a draper in Dudley, prominent radical, critic of church rates, Chair of the Dudley Political Union and later a Chartist and supporter of local mineworkers.[14]

Corbett, Joseph (dates unknown), a button burnisher and employee of Hammond and Turner, was a member of the Committee of Masters and Workmen formed in response to the distress of 1837. He later fell out with the button-makers' Loyal Albion Lodge and became an adherent of temperance principles.[15]

Dawson, George (1821–1876) was minister at Mount Zion Baptist Church from 1844-46 before his unorthodox views led to a split and to his founding the Church of the Saviour. He was a supporter of educational reform and was closely associated with the Civic Gospel.[16]

Dixon, Joseph (1784-1856) was a mechanic and draper, Baptist, friend of Edmonds and co-worker on a design of a machine for creating type. Dixon eventually settled as a haberdasher in Great Hampton Street and travelled to sell his wares.[17]

Docker, George (dates unknown) **and Hannah** (?-1826), Bond Street Baptist members, slaters with property at the foot of Newhall Hill. Mr Docker allowed the speakers' platform at the first Newhall Hill meeting, January 1817, to be placed against the wall of his premises.[18]

Douglas, R.K. (1785-1855) was editor of the *Birmingham Journal* from 1833 to about 1844. He played a significant role in the re-launch of the BPU in 1837, drafted the National Petition in 1838 and chaired the early sessions of the Chartist Convention in 1839 until he resigned with other Birmingham delegates.[19]

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[14] E. Taylor and J. Rowley, 'Samuel Cooke (1786-1861)', in J. Baylen and N. Gossman, *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals*, Vol. 2: 1830-70 (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1984), pp.153-155.
[15] Langford, *A Century of Birmingham Life,* Vol. 2, p. 573; Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union*, p. 128; Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 128-9, 136.
[16] I. Sellers, 'Dawson, George (1821–1876), preacher and political activist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-7347 (accessed 27 August 2020).
[17] CRL MS 14, *Journals and Notebooks of Joseph Dixon*, 5 Vols, 1809-1840s.
[18] *Bond Street Chapel Minute Book*, 14 March 1803, p. 277; *Wrightson's Triennial Trade Directories of Birmingham* for 1815, 1818, 1823; BA&C 151005, *Report of the Proceedings of the Town's Meeting held on Newhall Hill, Wednesday January 22nd 1817,* p. 2.
[19] Briggs, 'Press and Public', pp. 106-137, 111; Ward, *City-State and Nation*, p. 35.

Edmonds Family, See Family Tree, Appendix A

Amos Edmonds and children:

Edmonds, Amos (1722-1797)**,** gun barrel-maker, grandfather of George, married to Elizabeth Clark. He was a deacon of the Cannon Street Church. Three sons went on to join the ministry.[20]

Edmonds, Joseph (1744-1794), gun barrel-filer, first son of Amos Edmonds.[21]

Edmonds, Samuel (1747-?), second son of Amos Edmonds, uncle to George, a jeweller with a business in Dog Yard.[22]

Edmonds, Mary (1745-1826), daughter of Amos Edmonds, married buckle-maker Joseph Bower.[23]

Edmonds, Reverend Thomas (abt.1746-1834), trained for the ministry and subsequently served in Sutton-in-Elms, Leicestershire, Upton-on-Severn, Bridgnorth and Leominster.[24]

Edmonds, Reverend Edward (1750-1823), father of George, was a jeweller by trade, and a member of the Cannon Street Baptist Church before training for the ministry and founding the Bond Street Chapel.[25]

Edmonds, **John** (1752-1823) left Birmingham to be minister at Guilsborough, Northamptonshire, in 1781.[26] One of his children, Thomas Clarke Edmonds,

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[20] BA&C, BC 2/2/5/1, *Cannon Street Church Book 1778-1790*; *England & Wales, Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Registers, 1567-1970,* RG4, Piece 2972: Birmingham, Cannon Street (Baptist), 1786-1794, death of Amos Edmonds; BA&C, *Birmingham Biographies*, Cutting, 9 Jan 1916.

[21] DRO 34/M108, Birmingham, St Martin, 1 February 1769, Marriage of Joseph Edmonds, gun barrel filer, to Mary Noon*;* RG4, Piece 2972: Birmingham, Cannon Street (Baptist), 1786-1794, burial of Joseph Edmonds 20 March 1794.

[22] DRO 34/M108, Birmingham, St Martin, 24 December 1770, Marriage of Samuel Edmonds and Hannah Phillips; Samuel Edmonds, hat pin-maker, toy-master, *Charles Pye Directory of Birmingham,* 1785, 1788, 1791, 1797.

[23] DRO 34/M108, Birmingham, St Martin, 18 May 1766, Marriage of Joseph Bower and Mary Edmunds (sic); *England, Select Deaths and Burials, 1538-1991,* burial of Mary Bower, 8 Apr 1826, Birmingham, Warwickshire.

[24] BA&C, BC2/2/5/1 *Cannon Street Church Book,* Minutes January 1794 to March 1801, p.49; *Pigot's Directory, Herefordshire*, 1830; BA&C 213345, *Midland Association of Baptist Churches, bound volume of Circular Letters 1783-1830,*

[25] See Chapter Three for Edward Edmonds.

[26] BA&C, BC 2/2/6/4*, Cannon Street Names and Residences,* 1836.

(1784-1860) joined the ministry, was a well-known preacher and became the head Baptist Minister at Cambridge.[27]

Edmonds, Amos (abt. 1753-1834), youngest son of Amos Edmonds, gun-filer and dealer, was the most successful in business.[28] He supported George's family in the early 1820s, financing Patience's boot and shoe business. He made a second marriage in 1834 in Barford, Warwickshire and left an estate of over a thousand pounds.[29]

Children of Reverend Edward Edmonds[30]

Elizabeth Edmonds (1772-?), daughter of Edward and first wife Martha

Ephraim Edmonds (1779-1813), son of Edward and Martha

John Bunyan Edmonds (1785-1807), first son of Edward and Sarah

Enoch Edmonds (1786-1796)

George Whitfield Edmonds (1788-1868)

James Harvey Edmonds (1790-?), married Whardinna Hancock (?-1865) in 1814. In the 1841 census, James is listed as an 'American Trader, Whardinna as a 'straw bonnet maker'. One daughter Sarah had been born in the United States in 1830.[31]

Sarah Edmonds (1792-1879), married Frederick Price, a plumber and glazier from Ombersley in 1836. She may have lived with George and Patience before this marriage.

Edward Amos Edmonds (1794-1836), see Appendix B

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[27] Angus Library, 'Memoirs of Deceased Baptist Ministers,' *The Baptist Union Handbook*, 1861-1863, p. 98.
[28] *Chapman's Birmingham Directory for 1801* (Chapman: Birmingham, 1801). The business was based in Old Hinkley, a rapidly industrialising district in the south west corner of the town.
[29] *Warwickshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1910*, 29 March 1824, Marriage of Amos Edmonds to Hester (or Esther) Horton in Barton; TNA; Prerogative Court of Canterbury and Related Probate Jurisdictions: Will Registers; Class: PROB 11; Piece: 1840, Will of Amos Edmonds. A Mary Fairfax is one of the witnesses at his marriage, see Chapter Nine.
[30] Details of births of Edward's children and George's children are from *England & Wales, Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Registers, 1567-1970,* RG4/ 3113, Birmingham Bond Street (Baptist), 1775-1837.
[31] *1841 England Census*, Birmingham, St George.

Hannah Maria Edmonds (1796-1871) married James Silcock in 1821. They became master and matron of the children's asylum in 1847 but James' illness and death meant that their tenure was unsuccessful. Hannah lived for a period with George and Patience.[32]

Mary Ann Edmonds (1798-1847?) married Samuel Haycock, see below.

Ann Edmonds (1800-1802) and **Maria Edmonds** (1802-1803)

George and Patience Edmonds' children:

Horace Edmonds (1815-1840) was severely disabled and lived at home with his parents until his death.[33]

Clarissa Edmonds (1819-1914), married Richard Edensor, solicitor, lived in Derbyshire in the 1840s and 50s and had nine children. After the death of her husband and father within a two-year period, 1866-8, she moved to London to live with her third daughter, Patience, and son-in-law, Alfred Percy Sinett, a journalist. In 1901, aged 82 she headed a household with her son John and daughter Thomasine in Notting Hill. She died aged 94 in a house in Royal Crescent, Notting Hill, leaving over £2,000.[34]

Edwards, Eliezer (1815- 1891), author of *Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men* (1877) and *The Old Taverns of Birmingham* (1879), was a glass manufacturer and then journalist, writing in the *Birmingham Daily Mail,* and later publishing *Edgbastonia.*[35]

Emes, Josiah (abt.1770-1844) kept a button business in Lionel Street, was a member of Cannon Street and then Newhall Street Baptist Churches. He was

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[32] *Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937*, DRO 86/28, Reel 3, Handsworth, St Mary, 16 April 1821, marriage of James Silcock and Hannah Edmonds.
[33] Death Certificate for Horace Edmonds, d. 24 October 1840, Birmingham, St Mary, Deaths for 1840, No. 202.
[34] See Edmonds and Hancock Family Trees. *1871 England Census*, Kensington Town, Kensington, London; *1901 England Census*, Kensington Town, Kensington, London; *England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966, 1973-1995*, Clarissa Edensor, d. 8 May 1914, Middlesex England, Probate date 9 June 1914, London, England.
[35] E. Edwards, *Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men* (Birmingham, 1877) and *The Old Taverns of Birmingham: A Series of Familiar Sketches* (Birmingham, 1879); Harman and Showell, *Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham,* p. 302; S. Roberts, *Now Mr Editor! Letters to the Newspapers on Nineteenth Century Birmingham* (Birmingham Biographies Series, 2015), pp. 8-10.

already considered a 'veteran' reformer when he joined the BPU's Political Council in 1830. Later he became a member of the revived Political Council in 1838 and was close to the O'Connorite wing.[36]

Fussell, John (dates unknown), Chartist, a newspaper agent, joined the BPU's Rent Committee in December 1838. He was arrested with Edward Brown for incitement, soon after the Convention arrived in Birmingham, but eventually the case against him was dropped and he moved to London.[37]

Groves, Mary Ann (dates unknown) was the Secretary of the Female Political Union, 1838-9. Although critical of the established leadership of the Political Council, she and Mrs Lapworth attempted to preserve their organisation and re-launch it in November 1839.[38]

Guest, James (?-1881) was a radical bookseller, Owenite, and campaigner against newspaper stamp duty, known as the 'Taxes on Knowledge', imprisoned in 1834. He wrote a short history of the campaign, 'A Free Press and How it Became Free' which he published together with the Sixth Edition of William Hutton's *History of Birmingham*.[39]

Hadley, Benjamin (1791-1843?), pearl button manufacturer, a member of Thomas Attwood's currency circle who became secretary of the BPU. He was active in the campaign against church rates and was elected church warden of St Martin's. He was a delegate to the Chartist National Convention but withdrew with other

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[36] BA&C, BC 2/2/5/2 (BC2/8), *Cannon St Church Book 1781-1944*, 16 March 1814**;** *Pigot's Directory of Birmingham 1841*, p. 84; *1841 England Census*, Birmingham, St Paul; Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 34, 117, 154, 171.
[37] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, p.166; Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 202, 204, 210; Barnsby, *Birmingham Working People*, pp. 81-3, 92-3.
[38] BA&C LF76.11 Posters, *Important: Women of Birmingham*, calling notice November 1839, signed by Mrs Lapworth and Miss Grove; M. Thomis and J. Grimmett, *Women in Protest 1800-1850* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 130; H. Rogers, '"What Right have Women to Interfere with Politics?": the Address of the Female Political Union to the Women of England (1838)', in eds. Ashplant T. and Smyth, G., *Explorations in Cultural History* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), pp. 65-100, (87, 93).
[39] James Guest 'A Free Press,' inserted as pp. 493- 507 into BA&C, W. Hutton, *An History of Birmingham with considerable additions,* 6th edition (Birmingham: J. Guest, 1860); Harman and Showell, *Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham*, pp. 332-3; A. Briggs, 'Press and Public in Early Nineteenth-Century Birmingham', pp. 115-6.

Birmingham delegates in March 1839. He became an alderman of the first Town Council but left for Australia in the early 1840s.[40]

Hamper, William (1776–1831) was an antiquarian and local historian. As a Birmingham magistrate he showed sympathy for those affected by distress and retained cordial relations with Edmonds.[41]

Hancock Family, See Hancock Family Tree, Appendix A.

Hancock, William (?-1824), father of Patience, was a metal worker and renowned mechanic recognised by the Society of Arts for one of his inventions.[42]

Hancock, Patience (1782-1860), the third child of William Hancock and Mary Ward, married George Edmonds in 1812. She had two children, including the disabled Horace Edmonds. She ran a shoe business from 1820 to 1826. She presided over a household which included members of the extended family and shared premises with George's legal practice.

Hancock, Harriet (1776-1846), sister of Patience, married John Rollason, vellum-binder, but was widowed early. Their son **William Rollason** (1813-1864) became a tin-plate worker and adapted his skills to cast the type for George's *Philosophic Alphabet.* The wider Rollason family was involved in printing and publishing as part of the Pearson and Rollason publishing team.[43]

Hancock, Sarah (1802-1862), sister of Patience, became the wife of Timothy Massey, clerk to George Edmonds.

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[40] Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 18, 21, 151, 175; J. Bunce, *History of the Corporation of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1878), p. 18; Hadley may have had a dissenting background, according to Carlos Flick.

[41] W. Courtney and D. A. Johnson, 'Hamper, William (1776–1831), antiquary', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-12173 (accessed 27 August 2020); BA&C 125537, *Letters to William Hamper Volume Two,* Edmonds to Hamper, 17 July 1822.

[42] William Hancock, toymaker, Bromsgrove Street, *Chapman's Birmingham Directory, 1801*; Plater, *Wrightson's Triennial Directory for Birmingham, 1815,* p. 108; William Hancock, Original Plated Bead and Hinge Maker, Barford Street, *Wrightson's Triennial Directory, 1818*; *ABG,* 1 November 1824.

[43] *Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937,* DRO 25/46, Birmingham St Philip, 13 November 1810, Marriage of John Rollason and Harriet Hancock; *Birmingham, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1912,* DRO 34/9, Archive Roll M99, Birmingham St Martin, 17 May 1813, Birth of William Rollason; J. Money, *Experience and Identity*, p. 121.

Haycock, Samuel (? – 1861). The Haycocks were members of the Bond Street Chapel; Samuel, a mathematical instrument-maker, married George Edmonds' sister, Mary Ann. He appears on the list of those supporting the testimonial for Edmonds in 1831. He became a radical town councillor and was a member of the Duddeston-cum-Nechells Radical Reform Society.[44]

Hill family, Unitarians and social reformers:[45]

Thomas Wright Hill (1763-1851), educationalist, founder of Hill Top and Hazelwood Schools.[46]

Matthew Davenport Hill (1792-1872), lawyer, Recorder of Birmingham and penal reformer, friend of George Edmonds.[47]

Edwin Hill (1793-1876) was a member of the Birmingham Hampden Club, and later a civil servant and inventor.[48]

Rowland Hill (1795-1879) taught at the family schools then became a civil servant and postal reformer.[49]

Arthur Hill (1798-1885) was a member of the Hampden Club, joined the BPU in 1832, and became headmaster of Bruce Castle school.[50]

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[44] *Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937,* DRO 61, 552, Harborne, St Peters, 22 Nov 1818, Marriage of Samuel Haycock and Mary Ann Edmonds; BA&C, MS 3055/1 *Minutes of the Duddeston-cum-Nechells Radical Reform Society* 1839-1846; Bunce, *History of the Corporation of Birmingham*, pp. 113, 156.

[45] H. Smith, *Propertied Society and Public Life: The Social History of Birmingham, 1780-1832* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 2013), pp. 328-338.

[46] T. Cooper and C. Creffield. 'Hill, Thomas Wright (1763–1851), schoolmaster', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-13313 (accessed 7 June 2020).

[47] R. and F. Hill, *The Recorder of Birmingham, a Memoir of Matthew Davenport Hill; with Selections from his Correspondence* (London: Macmillan, 1878).

[48] I. D. Hill, 'Hill, Edwin (1793–1876), civil servant and inventor of postal machinery', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-13272 (accessed 28 August 2020).

[49] C. R. Perry, 'Hill, Sir Rowland (1795–1879), postal reformer and civil servant', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-13299 (accessed 7 October 2020).

[50] Behagg, *Politics and Production*, p 175,

Frederick Hill (1803-1896), reforming public servant, joined the BPU, as agreed by the family, and became a Political Council member in 1832.[51]

Holyoake, George (1817-1906) spent his boyhood and early manhood in Birmingham, a trained metal worker and successful student at the Mechanics' Institute. He became a follower of Robert Owen and a leading figure of the Cooperative Movement. His *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life* contains useful information on artisan life in Birmingham in the 1820s and 30s.[52]

James, John Angell (1785-1859), minister of the Presbyterian Carr's Lane Church from 1806 until his death. He was the leading non-conformist preacher in Birmingham in the first half of the nineteenth century and for the most part avoided direct political engagement, the anti-slavery campaign being an exception.[53]

Jennings, W. (c.1790-1842), long-standing radical, was on the Artisans Committee in 1812, spoke at the first Newhall Hill Meeting, joined the BPU Political Council in 1831 and again in 1837.[54]

Jones, Charles (dates unknown), silversmith, was a member of Attwood's currency circle, a founder member of the BPU and on its Political Council. He drew up a plan for a semi-military organisation along the lines of a National Guard in the Autumn of 1831. Carlos Flick suggests he was intemperate and referred to 'hook-nose Jews', amongst other epithets. By 1837 he had lost his medallist business and moved into gun-manufacture.[55]

Lapworth, Mrs (dates unknown), Chairwoman of the Female Political Union 1838-9, significant in organising support for a women's petition, for the boycott of goods,

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[51] F. Hill (ed. Constance Hill), *Autobiography of Fifty Years in Times of Reform* (Birmingham, 1893).
[52] G. Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1906); L Grugel, 'Holyoake, George Jacob (1817-1906)' in Baylen and Gossman, *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals*, Vol. 2: 1830-70, pp. 245-248.
[53] R. T. Jones, 'James, John Angell (1785–1859), Congregational minister and author', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-14614 (accessed 24 August 2020).
[54] BA&C 62800, *A Report of the Proceedings of the Artisans of Birmingham*; BA&C 151005 *Report of the Proceedings of the Town's Meeting held on Newhall Hill on Wednesday January 22nd, 1817* (Birmingham, 1817); Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 75, 117, 177.
[55] *BJ*, 5 November 1831; Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 18, 20, 117.

raising funds and organising educational meetings. She was active in the National Charter Association in 1841.[56]

Lewis, W. G. (abt.1790-1842) was a radical journalist from Coventry, who spoke at the July 1819 Newhall Hill Meeting and was jailed for sedition. He became editor of the *Birmingham Journal* from 1832 until R.K Douglas took over the following year.[57]

Luckcock family

> **James Luckcock** (1761-1835), Unitarian, educationalist and jewellery manufacturer, was a founder of the Brotherly Society, which sought to improve Sunday School education. He was a member of the Birmingham Society for Constitutional Information in 1792 and an ally of radicals in the 1817-19 period although never a member of the Hampden Club.
>
> **Felix and Urban Luckcock,** James' sons, served on the Political Council of the BPU.
>
> **Irene Luckcock,** daughter, was considered by James to be influential in the household. He reported that his friends remarked: 'GE rules the town, Luckcock rules GE, His wife rules L, His daughter rules his wife, Therefore Irene rules the town.'[58]

Maddocks, Charles (1778-1856) was variously a schoolmaster, pawnbroker and messenger to the Corporation. He was an important figure in the post-war agitation and took over George Edmonds' school in 1819. Defiant in the dock, he received a heavier (18-month) sentence than the other defendants following their conviction after the July 1819 Newhall Hill meeting. He spent his last years in ill-health and

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[56] BA&C LF76.11 Posters, *Important: Women of Birmingham*, calling notice November 1839, signed by Mrs Lapworth and Miss Grove; H. Rogers, '"What Right have Women to Interfere with Politics?": the Address of the Female Political Union to the Women of England (1838)', pp. 65-100.

[57] *Annual Register 1820*, p. 958; *Birmingham Monthly Argus*, Vol 4. No. 2, June 1832. p. 7; Briggs, 'Press and Public in Early Nineteenth-Century Birmingham', p. 112.

[58] BA&C 205744, J. Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs In Humble Life* (Birmingham, 1825); H. Smith, 'Luckcock, James (1761–1835), educational and political reformer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 3 October 2013; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-104437 (accessed 28 August 2020).

straitened circumstances, the Corporation keeping him on at reduced pay after he could no longer perform his duties. [59]

Massey family

Timothy Massey (1766-1842), a carpenter and radical, signed the calling notice for the Newhall Hill meeting of July 1819. He was active in the church rates campaign alongside William Morgan and Sam Haycock in Aston parish.[60]

Timothy Massey (1802-1871), son of the above, was George Edmonds' brother-in-law. He married Patience's youngest sister, Sarah, in 1830. He worked for Edmonds as a general clerk from about 1838 onwards and was a close member of the family, being present at Patience's death, a chief mourner at George's funeral and remaining a friend of Mary, George's second wife.[61]

Edward Massey (1803-1880), Timothy's brother, was a printer based in Graham Street and printed Edmonds' *Universal Alphabet*.[62]

McDonnell, Reverend Thomas (dates unknown), a Catholic priest and follower of Daniel O'Connell, was active in public life. He joined the BPU and was taken onto its Political Council. Although he left the Council in 1833, he continued his civic engagement, for instance, as an opponent of church rates.[63]

Morgan family

Morgan, Thomas (1776-1857) was a Baptist Minister, who succeeded Samuel Pearce at Cannon Street in 1802. He had to retire on health grounds in 1811, but then succeeded Edward Edmonds at Bond Street, after a period of joint ministry.

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[59] *BJ*, 5 April 1856.
[60] *ABG,* 20 January 1834; *BJ*, 28 May 1842; Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, p. 422.
[61] *Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and* Banns*, 1754-1937,* DRO 25/17, Archive Roll: *M48,* Birmingham St Philip, 14 November 1830, Marriage of Timothy Massey and Sarah Hancock; *ABG,* 13 November 1837; *Birmingham Mail*, 13 June 1871.
[62] *England Census 1861, Birmingham St Paul,* Edward Massey, 3 Graham St, Printer.
[63] Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 75, 98; Flick suggests (p.186 n) that Edmonds and McDonnell had disagreed over Catholic Emancipation, but this does not appear to be the case. Although the two had differences over the separation of church and state, they did not differ over the substance of Catholic civil rights.

Anne Morgan (1874-?), his wife, née Harwood, kept school in Moseley during the period of Thomas's illness.

William Morgan (1815-c1890), the third son of Thomas and Anne, trained as a solicitor. He was involved in the campaign against church rates and had his goods distrained. He became George Edmonds' deputy as Clerk of the Peace. He was a prominent abolitionist, working with Joseph Sturge. [64]

Morrison, James and Frances. James Morrison (1802-1835), a house-painter by trade, was a follower of Robert Owen, and became editor of the Owenite *Pioneer,* produced originally for the builders' trade union in Birmingham. His wife Frances (1807-1898) wrote articles on women's rights for the *Pioneer*. Later, after James' death in Manchester, she became a lecturer on the Owenite circuit.[65]

Muckley Family. William Muckley (?-1845), a founding member of the Bond Street Chapel, was a toy-maker. He married Elizabeth Edmonds (1757-1849), George's aunt. Three sons and three daughters were all born in Birmingham between 1796 and 1808, creating another section of the extended Edmonds family living close to young George's home.[66] Subsequently he trained for the ministry and moved to Shropshire and then Kidderminster. His son, another William, took over the toy business.[67]

Muntz Brothers. The Muntz family made their fortune through the manufacture of the compound 'Muntz metal'.

George Frederick Muntz (1794-1857), a member of the Political Council of the BPU, was part of Thomas Attwood's group of Tory currency reformers

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[64] A. E. Morgan, *Kith and Kin* (Birmingham, 1896); F.W. Butt-Thompson, 'The Morgans of Birmingham', *Baptist Quarterly,* Vol 2, Iss. 6, (1925), pp. 263-268; Langley, *Birmingham Baptists Past and Present,* p. 83.

[65] J. Rule, 'Morrison, James (1802–1835), journalist and trade unionist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-4876 (accessed 12 July 2020); B. Taylor, 'Morrison, Frances (1807–1898), socialist writer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-50075 (accessed 12 July 2020).

[66] *Birmingham, Bond Street (Baptist), 1775-1837, Register of Births*, RG4/3113, births of Muckley children.

[67] *England & Wales, FreeBMD Death Index, 1837-1915,* Kidderminster, Worcestershire, Vol 18. William: p.345, 1845 Q.1; Elizabeth: p. 320, 1849 Q1; *Chapman's Birmingham Directory for 1801*, *Wrightson's Triennial Directory for Birmingham for 1815*, p. 88.

who became convinced of the need for political reform. He was also a leading figure in the campaign against church rates and charged with affray as a result of the fracas at the vestry meeting in St Martin's Church in 1837. He was considered rather coarse in manner, but his plain speaking made him a popular figure amongst Birmingham workers. He was one of the two Birmingham MPs from 1840 to 1857.[68]

Philip Henry Muntz (1811-1888)**,** radical and liberal, campaigned for the incorporation of Birmingham, was a town councillor and Mayor for two terms, 1839-40. He was active in the revived BPU from 1837-9 and elected one of the delegates to the National Chartist Convention but resigned in March 1839, part of the split in Birmingham Chartism. He was a Birmingham MP from 1868-1885.[69]

O'Brien, James (Bronterre) (1804–1864) came to Birmingham to edit the radical *Midland Representative and Birmingham Herald* in 1831, leaving in 1832. He supported political reform, although he was critical of the compromises in the 1832 Act. He was an early socialist, a supporter of Robert Owen and became a radical Chartist, initially on the O'Connorite wing, but falling out with the latter in 1841.[70]

O'Neill, Arthur (1819-1896), a 'moral force' Chartist, he founded the Chartist Church in Birmingham in 1840, formed the Complete Suffrage Association with Joseph Sturge in 1842 and was imprisoned for addressing striking miners at Cradley. In 1847 he became Baptist Minister at Zion Chapel in Newhall Street.[71]

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[68] S. Timmins and M. Lee, 'Muntz, George Frederick (1794–1857), political reformer and industrialist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-19551 (accessed 12 July 2020); E. Edwards, 'G. F. Muntz', *Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men* (Birmingham, 1877).

[69] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 28 December 1888.

[70] A. Plummer, *Bronterre: A Political Biography of Bronterre O'Brien*, *1804-1864* (London: George Allen, 1971), pp. 35-43; M. Taylor, 'O'Brien, James (1804–1864), Chartist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography',* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20457 (accessed 12 July 2020);

[71] Langley, *Birmingham Baptists Past and Present,* pp.150-152; E. Taylor and J. Rowley, 'Arthur George O'Neill (1819-1896) in Baylen and Gossman, *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals*, Vol. 2: 1830-7, pp. 391-394; S. Roberts, *The Chartist Prisoners: the Radical Lives of Thomas Cooper (1805-1892) and Arthur O'Neill (1819-1896)* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008).

Oxford, Mrs (dates unknown), Female Political Union committee member 1838-9, she organised collections for the National Convention and was later associated with the National Charter Association.[72]

Osborne, John (dates unknown)**,** radical bookseller of Union Street, was prosecuted in 1820 for a libel on the army and imprisoned for a year in the House of Correction at Cold-Bath Fields.[73]

Palmer, John (dates unknown)**,** Attorney of Coleshill, employed Edmonds as his attorney's clerk between 1834 and 1835 when he was struck off for malpractice in connection with his relationship with Edmonds.[74]

Pare, William (1805-1873) was a co-operator and social reformer, leading figure in the Birmingham Cooperative Society, member of the BPU Political Council, and a town Councillor. He was active in many radical causes, especially the church rates question. He was appointed Registrar for Birmingham district but forced to resign in 1842 after attacks on his socialist and atheist views.[75]

Parkes, Joseph (1796-1865) was a Unitarian lawyer. A follower of Jeremy Bentham, he supported the Mechanics' Institute in Birmingham and took on a liaison role between the BPU and London Whigs in 1831 and 1832. He then moved to London where he helped ensure the passing of the Municipal Reform Bill.[76]

Pearce, Rev. Samuel (1766-1799) was the minister at Cannon Street Baptist Church from 1790 until his early death from tuberculosis in 1799. He was a charismatic Baptist preacher who combined training in the Particular Baptist tradition

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[72] H. Rogers, *Women and the People: Authority, Authorship and the Radical Tradition in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 96-97, 108.
[73] Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2, p. 436, Dent, *Old and New Birmingham*, Vol. 2, p. 360.
[74] John Palmer, Articles of Clerkship to E. F. Palmer, 1816, Coleshill Warwick, *Court of King's Bench: Plea Side: Affidavits of Due Execution of Articles of Clerkship, Series I*; Class: *KB 105*; Piece: *27;* John Palmer, Attorney, *Pigot's Directory for Warwickshire, p. 518.*
[75] W. Hewins, and M. Lee, 'Pare, William (1805–1873), co-operative movement activist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-21262 (accessed 12 July 2020); R. Garnett, *William Pare (1805-1873) Co-operator and Social Reformer*, Cooperative College Papers No. 16 (Loughborough: Cooperative Union Ltd, 1973).
[76] J. Buckley, *Joseph Parkes of Birmingham* (London: Methuen, 1926); J. McCarthy, 'Joseph Parkes (1796-1865)' in Baylen and Gossman, *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals*, Vol. 2: 1830-70, pp. 398-401.

with a passionate evangelical approach. He was a fierce opponent of the Test and Corporation Acts and preached a significant sermon in favour of repeal.[77]

Phipson Family, Unitarians and metal manufacturers, involved with the Assay Office. Thomas Phipson (1738-1807) married Elizabeth Ryland, and this connection with the Rylands helped Thomas junior become a successful pin-maker. Phipson members served as Guardians and as Street Commissioners. William Phipson (1770-1845) was criticised by Joseph Russell in 1828 for defending the Street Commission's oligarchic nature, despite being 'a professed liberal'.[78]

Potts, Thomas (c.1761-1833), a merchant, was one of the few well-to-do Baptists involved in commercial and civic life in the early nineteenth century. He was a deacon of Cannon St Church. He took part in the 1812 campaign against the Orders in Council, and was a member of the deputation to London with Thomas Attwood and Richard Spooner. He signed requisitions for reform meetings in 1827,1833 and 1832.[79]

Price, Theodore (1758-1852), Magistrate, nail merchant and landowner of Harborne. He was believed to be the author of the 'Job Nott' letters, popularly written pamphlets critical of local radicals, issued between 1792 and 1819. Price was also a fierce critic of the truck system of payment.[80]

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[77] S. Pearce, *The oppressive, unjust, and prophane nature, and tendency of the Corporation and Test Acts, exposed, in a sermon, preached before the congregation of Protestant Dissenters, meeting in Cannon-Street, Birmingham, February 21, 1790, Printed at the Request of the Committee of the seven Congregations of the three Denominations of Protestant Dissenters in Birmingham*, (Birmingham: J. Thompson, 1790); Langley, *Birmingham Baptists Past and Present,* pp. 32-35 ; E. Clipsham, 'Pearce, Samuel (1766–1799), Baptist minister', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-21690 (accessed 19 August 2020).

[78] G. Hartley, 'Family Fortunes in the Industrial Revolution: the Phipsons of Birmingham', Seminar for the Friends of the Centre for West Midlands History, University of Birmingham, 8 March 2018. Ginny Hartley is currently completing a PhD on the Phipson family; Smith, *Propertied Society and Public Life: The Social History of Birmingham, 1780-1832,* pp. 290-291.

[79] MS 670/19 'Letter to the congregation in Newhall Street from the pastor and Deacons in Cannon Street' in *Miscellaneous collection of manuscript and printed items, many relating to the Edmonds family of Birmingham*; Harman and Showell, *Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham*, p. 280; R. Ram 'Influences on the Patterns of Belief and Social Action among Birmingham Dissenters between 1750 and 1870', in *Religion in the Birmingham Area: Essays in the Sociology of Religion* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham 1975), p. 75.

[80] BA&C, *A Catalogue of the Birmingham Collection* p. 718; R. Dent, *Old and New Birmingham*, Volume 2 from 1860 to 1832 (Wakefield: E.P. Publishing, 1973 [1878-80]), pp. 303-4.

Ragg, George (1782-1836), radical, published the *Birmingham Argus*, 1818-19, was a member of the Committee of the Union Society in 1819, imprisoned in 1819 and jailed in 1821 for 12 months in Cold Bath Fields. He suffered ill-health as a result.[81]

Redfern, William (c.1801-1872) was a lawyer and Unitarian. An associate of Joseph Parkes, he was considered by Tory critics to be part of the 'Cabal' of Whig sympathisers in the 1820s. Although a supporter of parliamentary reform he unsuccessfully opposed the formation of the Political Union in 1830. He was appointed Town Clerk in 1839.[82]

Russell, Joseph (c.1788-1840) was a radical printer, book-binder and bookseller in Moor Street, jailed in 1819 for selling radical literature and again in 1820. He was a critic of the oligarchic nature of the Street Commissioners, a campaigner against Church Rates, and a radical member of the BPU's Political Council, although a supporter of household, rather than universal suffrage.[83]

Ryland, Arthur (c.1805-77) was a member of the prominent manufacturing and land-owning Unitarian Ryland family. Arthur became a lawyer, secretary of the Birmingham Law Society and founder of its library. He supported a variety of educational and philanthropic causes.[84]

Salt, T.C. (1788-1859), lamp manufacturer, a follower of Attwood's currency theory, he was a founder member of the BPU and of its Political Council. He played an important role in the revival of the Political Union in 1837-8, especially in organisation, propaganda and in the formation of the Female Political Union. He was elected as a delegate to the Chartist Convention but resigned with others in March 1839.[85]

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[81] *Birmingham Argus*, 1818-19; BA&C 63207 *Report of the Proceedings of the Public Dinner given in honour of Mr Wooler on his liberation from Warwick Gaol* (Birmingham, 1822); Langford, *A Century,* Vol. 2, p. 438; Dent, *Old and New Birmingham*, Volume 2, p. 360; Behagg, *Politics and Production*, p 94. Ragg's ill-health became apparent when he addressed the Dinner for T.J. Wooler in July 1822.
[82] R. B. Rose, 'Political and Administrative History: Political History to 1832', in W. B. Stephens (ed.), *A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 7, the City of Birmingham* (London: Victoria County History, 1964), pp. 270-297. *British History Online*, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol7/pp270-29 (accessed 27 August 2020); Ward, *City –State and Nation,* p. 35.
[83] Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 94-97, Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 26, 77.
[84] Harman and Showell, *Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham*, p. 342.
[85] Harman and Showell, *Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham*, p. 617; Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp 54, 58, 108; Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 20-21, 131, 134; R. Ward, *City –State and Nation*, p. 27.

Scholefield, Joshua (1774-1844), Birmingham merchant and Whig supporter, he was also an associate of Thomas Attwood. He was on the BPU's Political Council from its inception and was chosen to be parliamentary candidate in 1832, alongside Attwood, in preference to George Edmonds, causing a rift between the two. Scholefield continued as MP until his death.[86]

> **William Scholefield** (1809-1867), his son, was the first Mayor of Birmingham. He faced criticism for calling in the Metropolitan Police at the time of the Chartist Convention in July 1839. He was, however, a committed radical-liberal and acted as such as a parliamentarian, serving as MP for Birmingham 1847-67.[87]

Smith, W. Hawkes (1786-1840), Unitarian, lithographer and radical, Hawkes Smith published the *Birmingham Inspector* in 1817 and was a leading figure in the Mechanics' Institution from its founding in 1825. He became a sympathiser of Robert Owen and was a supporter of the Birmingham Equitable Labour Exchange. He published several surveys of Birmingham, notably *Birmingham and its Vicinity as a Manufacturing and Commercial District.*[88]

Somerville, Alexander (1811-1825). Born into poverty in East Lothian and self-taught, Somerville became a soldier in the Scots Greys, posted in Birmingham during the reform crisis of 1832. After writing to a newspaper explaining that the soldiers would defend property but not prevent people exercising their civil rights, Somerville was sentenced to flogging and the case became a *cause célèbre*. He later wrote his *Autobiography of a Working Man.*[89]

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[86] R. W. Davis, 'Scholefield, Joshua (1774/5–1844), politician and businessman', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-24814 (accessed 28 August 2020). See Chapter Six for the Edmonds-Scholefield rift.

[87] H. Miller, 'Scholefield, William (1809–1867), politician and businessman', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-2481 (accessed 28 August 2020).

[88] *Birmingham Inspector,* 1817; *BJ,* 12 Nov 1825; BA&C 352872, E. Hampton, *Early Cooperation in Birmingham and District* (Birmingham: Birmingham Cooperative Society, 1928), p. 37; W.H. Smith**,** *Birmingham and its Vicinity as a Manufacturing and Commercial District* (London and Birmingham**,** 1836).

[89] A. Somerville, *The Autobiography of a Working Man* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967 [1848]); J. Hamburger, 'Somerville, Alexander (1811–1885), journalist and soldier', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 September 2004; https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-2601 (accessed 12 July 2020).

Spooner, Isaac and Richard, were members of a banking family. Isaac Spooner (1774-1849) was a Birmingham magistrate and Tory. His brother **Richard** (1783-1864) took a more radical path as a young man, leading a campaign against the Orders in Council in 1812 with his business partner Thomas Attwood. However, he did not join the BPU and became a committed Tory from the 1830s onwards. He was defeated in several parliamentary elections but served as MP for Birmingham from 1844-47.[90]

Spry, Reverend J.H. (1777-1854) of Christ Church Birmingham was a protagonist in the verbal battle between loyalists and reformers between 1817-20, clashing with Edmonds first over Spry's request for a special rate to support Christ Church and again over sermons he preached in 1819. He was an instigator of the 'Birmingham Association for the Refutation and Suppression of Blasphemy and Sedition' which published several of his sermons and other loyalist tracts.[91]

Steer, John (c.1793-1857) was a member of a Unitarian family, friendly with the Hills. He and his brother Samuel founded the radical *Midland Chronicle*, 1810-14, together with J. Orton Smith and W. Hawkes Smith. John Steer was a jeweller by trade and was the Chair of the Committee of Artisans formed to support Attwood and Spooner's campaign against the Orders in Council. Later he moved to London to train as a lawyer.[92]

Sturge, Joseph (1793–1859) was a Quaker, merchant and anti-slavery campaigner who played a significant role in Birmingham civic life. He pressed for full emancipation of slaves in British colonies from 1831 onwards and led the campaign against the post-slavery apprenticeship scheme. He supported the Anti-Corn Law

[90] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 25 November 1864, Ward, *City-State and Nation*, pp. 22-3.

[91] BA&C 65644, Rev J. Hume Spry, *The Duty of Obedience to Established Government*, *Extract from a Sermon Preached at Christ Church, Birmingham on Sunday 28 November 1819* (Birmingham, 1819); J. Speller, 'The Churches and Radical Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century England: A Study of the Reform Movement in Birmingham, 1815-19', *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Spring 1986), pp. 305-320.

[92] *Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths surrendered to the Non-parochial Registers Commissions of 1837 and 1857*; RG 4; Piece Number: *3999,* John Steer, buried 12 February 1837*; Midland Chronicle*, Volume One 1811-1814*;* C. Steer, *Catherine Biddlecombe Steer's Memoir, (1849),* copyright Michael Maxwell Steer, Tisbury, Wilts*;* R. and F. Davenport Hill, *The Recorder of Birmingham*, *A Memoir, with Selections from his Correspondence* (London: Macmillan, 1878), p. 8.

League, founded the Complete Suffrage Union in 1842, and was active in many pro-peace campaigns in the 1840s and 50s.[93]

Swan, Reverend Thomas (1795-1757) was minister of Cannon Street Church from 1829 until his death in 1857. He was an advocate of political reform and a prominent campaigner against slavery, preaching that 'God hath made of one blood all the nations of men' and leaving a collection of his speaker's notes.[94]

Turner family. The Turners were button manufacturers; the firm merged with that of Samuel Hammond to become Hammond and Turner with a large manufactory on Snow Hill. **John Turner** (?-1840) was High Bailiff in 1817, a Poor Law Guardian and a cautious reformer.[95]

Vince, Reverend Charles (1823–1874). Vince was pastor at Mount Zion Baptist Church at Graham Street from 1852 until his death in 1874. He was a member of the first School Board and associated with the educational ideas of the Civic Gospel. He made a passionate defence of political engagement in his oration at Edmonds' funeral.[96]

Watson, Henry (dates unknown) was Chair of the United Trades organisation in 1832 and participated in the creation of the short-lived Midland Union of the Working Classes. Together with Thomas Baker he organised the Working Men's Memorial Committee in 1837 and agitated for radical action from the re-formed BPU. Taken onto the Political Council in July 1838, he became frustrated with the existing leadership and was unable to hold the coalition together in early 1839. He considered that labour was the source of all wealth and that the Charter was a 'bread and cheese question'.[97]

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[93] A. Tyrrell, 'Sturge, Joseph (1793–1859), philanthropist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 23 September 2004, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-26746 (accessed 27 August 2020); Ward, *City-State and Nation: Birmingham's Political History 1830-1940* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2005), pp. 43-7.

[94] BA&C MS 1675, Reverend Thomas Swan collection; A. Langley, *Birmingham Baptists Past and Present*), pp. 36-37; Reverend Thomas Swan, https://www.birminghamcivicsociety.org.uk/reverend-thomas-swan-1795-1857-baptist-minister-and-social-reformer/ (accessed 14 November 2020).

[95] Behagg, *Politics and Production*, p. 162; C. Chinn, 'Benefits Street: the real James Turner revealed', *Birmingham Mail,* 27 January 2004.

[96] *BJ*, 4 July 1868; Langley, *Birmingham Baptists Past and Present*, pp. 104-105; A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, pp. 200-201; J. Briggs, 'Elite and Proletariat in Nineteenth-century Birmingham Nonconformity', pp. 71-98, 85.

[97] Barnsby, *Birmingham Working People,* p. 72; Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, p 138, 166, Behagg *Politics and Production*, pp. 180, 191, 196, 199.

Weston, Thomas (1792-1873) was a merchant, although he came from a poor rural background. He was on the Political Council of the BPU in 1831-2 but was not a supporter of Attwood's currency theories. He joined the revived Political Council again in 1837. He was one of the first town councillors and served as Mayor in 1844. Weston and Edmonds collaborated on several occasions, for example, in 1831 in an unsuccessful search for a compromise over church rates, and later in the Anti-Corn Law campaign.[98]

White, George (1812-1868), Chartist, was a supporter of Feargus O'Connor, organiser of the National Charter Association in Birmingham and a significant figure in the Black Country miner's strike of 1842. He spent eight months in jail in 1843 then became a national Chartist lecturer, returning to the area in the 1850s.[99]

Whitworth, Charles (dates unknown), schoolmaster, was a member of the Hampden Club and may have been caught up in the Oliver affair although the evidence is scant. He became Chairman of the Union Society in July 1819 and was arrested in December for an 'inflammatory handbill' printed by Ragg.[100]

[98] Dent, *Old and New,* Vol. 3, p. 494; Flick, *Birmingham Political Union*, p. 102; Behagg, *Politics and Production,* p.199.
[99] Barnsby, *Birmingham Working People,* pp. 90-97, 119-120.
[100] Langford, *A Century*, Vol. 2. p. 430; Behagg, *Politics and Production*, pp. 90- 92.

APPENDIX D

Membership of Radical Committees Birmingham 1812-19

1812 Artisans' Committee	1817 Requisition Newhall Hill	1818 Committee	1819 meeting; Union Society Committee
		Alcock, J.	Alcock, J., meeting notice
		Alcock, W.	
	Amphlett, Thomas		
Aston, Jabez			
			Allen, Union Society Cttee
Bailey, William			
		Bannister, W.	
	Barr, George		
	Barrington, Philip		
	Bellis, James		
		Belby, R.	
		Belcher, J.	
	Benson Joseph	Benson, J.	
			Billingham, Union Soc. Cttee
		Blood, R.	
	Bogle, John		
Bourne, John			
Boyce, James			
		Bower, G.	
Bower, Joseph			
	Bradley, S.		
			Brandis, Union Soc. Cttee
			Brown, Union Soc. Cttee
			Broomhead, Union Soc.
	Bullock, W.		
			Buncher, Union Soc Cttee
	Burrell, S.		
	Burton, John		
		Butterworth, Bros	

	Castle, Edmond		
	Clarke, Thomas	Clarke, T.	
Connard, James			
		Corn, E	
	Cox, George	Cox, G.	Cox, G., meeting notice
	Cox, Thomas		
Cox, William			
Crowder, Edward			
		Deakin, J.F.	
		Dearman, I.P.	
Dent, William			
	East, George		
Edmonds, G.	Edmonds, G.	Edmonds, G. *	Edmonds, Chairs meeting
			Ellis, Union Soc. Cttee
	Evans, James		
		Evans, T.	
	Eve, Samuel		
	Fellows, John		
		Fiddian, C.	
		Forbes, J.	
		Francis, W.	
		Greaves, J.	
		Grundy, M.	
			Hall, Union Soc. Cttee
		Halliday, J.	
		Hancock, C.	
	Harcourt, James		
			Harcourt, R. and W., notice
		Harrison, S.	
	Harrison, Thomas		
	Heaton, Ralph		
		Hesketh, E.	
		Hill, D.	
	Hill, Edwin		
Hincks, John	Hincks, John	Hincks, John *	

			Hollis jun., Union Soc. Cttee
		Hutton, J.	
		Hutton, S.	
Jennings, William	Jennings, William	Jennings, W.*	
	Jones, Joseph	Jones, J.	
Kelk, Charles			
Latham, William			
			Lakins, Union Soc. Cttee
	Lawrence, S.		
		Lawrence, J.T.	
		Lucas, J.P.	
	Lovatt, R.		
	Luckcock, James	Luckcock, J.	
	Luckcock, Joseph	Luckcock, Joseph	Collection for Peterloo
	Maddocks, Charles		Maddocks, C., speaker; Union Society committee
			Massey, T., meeting notice
		Matthews, W.	
		Messenger, T.	
	Moore, W.	Moore, W. *	
			Morgan, Union Society Cttee
		Mottram, C.	
	Osborne, P.		
		Osler, T.	
		Perkins, M.	
		Phipson, J.	
		Pole, C.	
		Potts, J	
	Probin, William		
			Price, Union Society Cttee
	Ragg, George		Ragg, Union Society Cttee
	Retchley, J.S.		
		Ridout, J.	
		Ryland, John	
		Ryland, T.	

		Scholefield, J.	
		Shakespeare, W.	
		Shore, J.	
	Simond, A.		
		Small, T.	
	Smith, Isaac		
		Smith, T and S.	
	Smith, W.H.		
Steer, John			
Taylor, Thomas			
		Titley, J.	
		Tutin, R.	
	Thompson, E.		
Thorpe, Samuel			
	Wainwright, S.		
		Watson, G.	
	Wareham, Joseph		
	Whitehouse, W.N.		
	Whitworth, C.		Whitworth, Union Soc. Chair
Wight, William			
	Wignall, W.H.		
	Wilkes, J.A.	Wilkes, J.A. spoke at meeting	
		Wills, W.	
	Willmore, Joseph		
Wood, Joseph		Wood, J.	
		Wright, D.	
	Wright, Thomas	Wright, T.	
		*spoke at meeting but not on committee	

Sources: BA&C 62800, *A Report of the Proceedings of the Artizans of Birmingham…on Wednesday 17th June 1812*; J. Langford, *A Century of Birmingham Life, Vol 2.*, pp. 414, 420; BA&C 64255, *Report of the Town's Meeting held on Thursday February 26th, 1818*; *Report of the Meeting on Newhall Hill, July 1819*, in TS 25/2035; BA&C 49726, *Union Society Declaration and Rules, 31 Aug 1819.*

APPENDIX E

The Two Radical George Edmonds

There were two radicals named 'George Edmonds' active in the mid-1830s, a fact which has caused some confusion to historians and archivists. This puzzle was first noted in 1881 by the bibliographer George Boase, writing in *Notes and Queries*; Boase disentangled the two Edmondses, giving a short account of the life of Birmingham George Edmonds and noting that the London-based George Edmonds (1805-1869) was also a radical, an attorney and had an interest in grammar, publishing several pamphlets on the topic.[1] Two subsequent entries in *Notes and Queries* provided further clarification: a William Bates supplied further details of Birmingham George Edmonds' career.[2] George Julian Harney followed, taking the trouble to write from Cambridge, Massachusetts, expressing his thanks to 'Edmonds No. 1' for his defence of Harney at the time of the Chartist riots. He referred to the work of George Edmonds No. 2 in the unstamped newspapers campaign and to his popular grammars and dictionaries. Harney concluded that 'the "two Dromios" were both Radicals, but of different types. In my opinion, they did good service in their day. Peace to the memory of both – peace with honour'.[3]

However, some confusion has persisted. For example, E. P. Thompson, referring to a pamphlet called *The English Revolution,* attributes it to George Edmonds, 'the witty and courageous Radical schoolmaster, who had chaired Birmingham's first great post-war demonstration on Newhall Hill (January 1817)'.[4] However, the attribution is

[1] *Notes and Queries*, 6th S. IV, 6 August 1881, pp.102-103. George Boase (1829-1897) was a bibliographer and antiquary.
[2] *Notes and Queries*, 6th S. IV, 10 September 1881, pp. 210-211.
[3] *Notes and Queries*, 6th S. IV, 31 December 1881, pp. 539-540. The 'Two Dromios' refers to the good-humoured twins in Shakepeare's *The Comedy of Errors.*
[4] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 892.

made doubtful by the hostility shown to the 1832 Reform Bill in the passage quoted by Thompson: 'I am not a householder – I can, on a push, be a musket-holder. The nothing-but-the-Bill does not recognise George Edmonds as a citizen! – George Edmonds scorns the nothing-but-the-Bill…'[5] Birmingham George Edmonds, in contrast, was a critical supporter of the 1832 Reform Bill, even if he considered it only a first step.

Two other pamphlets written by the London George Edmonds can be traced. *Edmonds' Citizen-Soldier, with the New Black List; or The Devil's Own* was written during the May 1832 Reform Bill crisis, and included a defence of the right to bear arms. This was a similar position to that held by Birmingham Edmonds but contained detailed advice on street fighting and where to buy arms, information the latter would not have committed to print.[6] The author of an 1836 pamphlet *Appeal to the Labourers of England: an exposure of aristocratic spies and the infernal machinery of the Poor Law Murder Bill* can be identified as the London Edmonds' work by the fact that it could be 'had of George Edmonds, 20 East St, Lamb's Conduit Street'. [7]

Iorwerth Prothero distinguished between the two George Edmondses, listing both in the index of his *Artisans and Politics in early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and his Times,* although he then compounded the confusion by referring to Edward Amos Edmonds as Birmingham George Edmonds' son, rather than his brother.[8]

[5] G. Edmonds, *The English Revolution* (1831), p. 5, cited Thompson, *The Making*, p. 892.
[6] BA&C 72735, G. Edmonds, *Edmonds' Citizen-Soldier with the New Black List; or The Devil's Own* (London, n.d. [1832?]). The advice is also clearly London-based.
[7] G. Edmonds, *Appeal to the Labourers of England: an exposure of aristocratic spies and the infernal machinery of the Poor Law Murder Bill (*London: S. Wilson) [n.d 1836?]. See Chapter Seven.
[8] I. Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and his Times* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1979). See Appendix B for Edward Amos Edmonds.

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405889 Bond Street Baptist Chapel Minute Book, 1785-1828

405835 Minute Book for the Use of the Bond Street Society for Mental Improvement, 1828-43

BC/2 Cannon Street Church

BC/2/2/51-2 Church Books 1778-1840

BC2/2/6/1-4 Members' names 1780-1836

BC2/4/1/1/1-2 Church Meeting Minutes 1794-1831

MS 1114 Autobiographical Notebooks and Memoirs of Thomas Clark Junior

125537 Letters to William Hamper, Volume Two

'Charles Maddocks' Appeal' in *Birmingham Scrapbook*, Vol. 1, Part Two A, p. 21

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